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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE THEATRE OF

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE

by



Sally Elizabeth Rehorick

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ABSTRACT

Guillaume Apollinaire is known primarily for his volumes of poetry and art criticism. His contributions to the theatre have been generally overlooked by scholars who, at best, have recognized only the first of his plays, Les Mamelles de Tirésias. His other two plays, Couleur du Temps and Casanova, although they have not had as great an influence on the modern theatre as his first play, show typical aspects of the author's personality and other works. Couleur du Temps reveals Symbolist tendencies and reflects the playwright's penchant for established forms of art; Casanova, a light comedy, is a manifestation of Apollinaire's early interest in the Italian theatre and his inherent need to entertain.

The diversity of the three plays is not an unusual aspect of Apollinaire's work for both in his poetry and critical works he sampled several different forms. He felt that through experimentation and application of "l'esprit nouveau", the pessimism abounding in the arts of his time could be overcome. This penchant for experiment together with the various influences of his contemporaries such as Antoine, Copeau, Cocteau, and especially Alfred Jarry are the underlying causes for the multifariousness of his three plays.

Apollinaire's theatrical concepts are found principally in Le Théâtre Italien, in a program note which he wrote for Cocteau's Parade and in the Preface and Prologue of Les Mamelles de Tirésias.

For Apollinaire, the main concern of the theatre is the renovation of the theatrical art which he felt had been destroyed by the realistic theatre. Les Mamelles de Tirésias comes the closest to accomplishing this aim. In fact, it is this play which has had a continuing influence on the development of the modern theatre.

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PART I

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE

THE ATMOSPHERE OF APOLLINAIRE'S ERA

" . . . in this character there is on one side enthusiasm which graces but cannot dwell deeply enough on the quality of things or of beings. There is an excess of rapidity, a desire to burst things into small pieces and details. On the other side there is meticulousness which sustains the outburst and cools it. This compensating movement is still in action: abundance, brilliancy or paucity, selection and adjustment followed by impetuosity and plans immediately upset."¹

[Valentine Penrose]

Although Guillaume Apollinaire's life and writings have been the object of extensive criticism, surprisingly no two critics seem to have formulated a common departure point. Apollinaire has been variously described as "the impresario of the avant-garde,"² "batailleur, [. . .] fantaisiste et multiforme,"³ and as "un symboliste moyenâgeux et un supermoderne."⁴ Yet the complexity of Apollinaire's personality allows a wide array of conflicting labels. Marcel Adéma, one of Apollinaire's more indefatigable biographers, says of the poet:

A-t-il été gai ou mélancholique, sérieux
ou mystificateur, vertueux ou libertin,
croyant ou athée, bourgeois ou bohème?
On peut à son sujet se poser toutes ces
questions et répondre positivement à
toutes, car il fut tout cela à la fois
dans l'épanouissement d'une complexe
personnalité.⁵

Given Apollinaire's diverse nature, all attempts to classify his thought processes under the rubrics of Symbolist or Cubist, Positivist or Humanist, must initially recognize and deal with the problem of defining an approach.

Superficially, Apollinaire - poet, critic, dramatist - can be described as the good-natured jovial "ringmaster of the arts"⁶ to whom most artists of the Parisian bohemia looked for guidance. But what lay behind this often insecure mask of humour could seldom be as easily fathomed. The aura of mystery that clung to Apollinaire originated from his illegitimate and enigmatic birth and has continued until the present time. The poet himself cultivated these mysteries and often invented stories about his background for the pure joy of amusing himself and others.⁷ Apollinaire refused to be classified and even in

his critical works he retained a purposeful ambiguity:

L'esprit nouveau est avant tout ennemi
de l'esthétisme, des formules et de
tout snobisme. Il ne lutte point contre
quelque école que ce soit, car il ne
veut pas être une école mais un des
grands courants de la littérature en-
globant toutes les écoles, depuis le
symbolisme et le naturisme.⁸

Such a cult of ambiguity exposed a basic flaw in Apollinaire's personality - his defensiveness. This defensive attitude may well have been justified, for as Margaret Davies suggests, "it is difficult not to strike some sort of defensive attitude about being illegitimate."⁹ In part, this may account for the tremendous diversity of Apollinaire's writings, extending from the picturesque war poems of Calligrammes to the essentially symbolist drama Couleur du Temps to his numerous Chroniques d'Art which he wrote for a variety of journals. Apollinaire's own conception of his birth may be reflected in this vast collection of works. By making of himself a living enigma and by creating such a variety of works, Apollinaire in effect avoided any classification of either himself or his writings. His was a particularly insecure personality and Francis Carmody suggests that Apollinaire "appears to have made a veritable cult of newness and surprise, as if through an imperative need to reassure himself that his creative powers had not flagged."¹⁰

Nowhere is this "cult of newness and surprise" more evident than in his theatre. He wrote only three plays and these of such variability that one might hastily pass them off as incidentals in Apollinaire's work. The first, Les Mamelles de Tirésias written as a cubist experiment,¹¹ was in many ways a precursor of the absurd.

Couleur du Temps, his second play, is a symbolist work while Casanova is a light comedy in the Italian style. Had they been written at widely separated periods, one might be able to justify their dissimilarities inasmuch as Apollinaire's aesthetics changed markedly throughout his life. All three plays, however, were written in the two years before the poet's death. Therefore the link among the three plays must be sought in their differences and not in any similarities.

Upon closer examination, the works can be seen to represent three very different yet essential facets of Apollinaire's personality. Les Mamelles de Tirésias, besides being a cubist play, was a manifesto for "l'esprit nouveau", a doctrine which was essentially an extension of Apollinaire's personality, and which relied upon novelty and surprise for its success. Couleur du Temps shows the author's penchant for tradition and the older schools and Casanova was a manifestation of Apollinaire's inherent need to entertain and to be light-hearted, at least on the surface. These elements - newness, tradition and entertainment - reveal three of the poet's basic traits, ones which are manifest throughout his works.

This is why it is inadvisable to study Guillaume Apollinaire without some knowledge of his life. What at first may appear to be disorganisation or discontinuity in his works is in fact the route that the poet himself has taken. The ambiguity of the works is a result of the ambiguity of the author and much of his richness would be lost if his biography were not taken into account.

Before an analysis of his theatre can be undertaken, it is

necessary to situate Apollinaire in the social context in which he lived. His life style greatly affected his writings as was the case with many of his contemporaries.

The Paris that Apollinaire arrived in at the age of nineteen was undergoing an immense social change. It was an ambiance of prosperity and optimism - a surface optimism granted, but nevertheless a glitter such as France had not seen since the Pre-French revolution era:

Paris now had the space to look at herself and see that she was no longer a village clustered about a few grandiose palaces, nor merely a city of bustling commerce and exchange. She had become a stage, a vast theater for herself and all the world.¹²

The war of 1870-71 had left many French people with a bitter taste which they tried to dispel during the remaining years of the century. This they did with a self-conscious enthusiasm that was manifested in a whole new way of living.

The arts saw a small group of artists trying to rid Paris of the formality of schools of art. They began to meet in cafés instead of the salons whose rigorous sessions they felt stifled creativity. The café became a way of life for this Bohemian minority and continued to grow in popularity until at least the 1930's. What these artists sought was the destruction of existing institutions and schools of art. Naturalism and decadence were to bear the brunt of these attacks.

On one hand can be distinguished a general negative reaction to the pessimistic kind of naturalism of Zola or the positivism of

Renan or Taine. Even if there were still underlying social and economic problems, there were nevertheless conscious attempts made to create a more optimistic atmosphere. Henri Bergson, for example, was one of the first to recognize that the scientific method was inimical to the humanities because it stifled any kind of creative energy present. Instead, it was now a matter of a changing point of view; philosophers and writers searched for a new link between nature, intelligence and instinct as if a kind of ontological insecurity had been at the root of all literary creation. Christian S  n  chal saw the new tendencies this way:

Alors que le naturalisme de Taine se bornait    amasser de 'petits faits,' donc    un travail d'analyse identique    celui des sciences de la nature [. . .] les romanciers nouveaux croient    la possibilit   de saisir le monde de la vie et de l'  me, non plus au moyen de l'analyse et de l'intelligence discursive qui ne travaille que sur des symboles de dehors, mais par l'intuition, qui n'est nullement divination inv  rifiable, mais une sorte d'instinct 'devenu d  sint  ress  , conscient de lui-m  me, capable de r  fl  chir sur son objet et de l'  largir ind  finiment' [. . .] bref, sympathie comme l'instinct, mais sympathie intellectuelle. . ..¹³

The idea that art was no longer acceptable as mirror-like imitation of life was echoed throughout the twentieth century. As Apollinaire succinctly stated with reference to Cubism:

Ce qui diff  rencie le cubisme de l'ancienne peinture, c'est qu'il n'est pas un art d'imitation, mais un art de conception qui tend    s'  lever jusqu'   la cr  ation.¹⁴

Besides this negative reaction to naturalism, there was both a rejection and acceptance of decadence. Not really a literary

school as such, decadence was more of a mood that pervaded the entire social structure including not only literature but all aspects of society: "religion, moeurs, justice, tout décade."¹⁵ The cultivation and enjoyment of all sorts of excesses was reflected not only in the creation of literary characters like Des Esseintes but in the life styles of living beings as well. This cult of the artificial, which in France can be traced back to Baudelaire at least was still very evident at the turn of the century. In its evolved form, rather than being a "deterioration which is somehow both corrupt and alluring"¹⁶, it was a creative deterioration, a kind of phoenix optimism.

This was the beginning of what was termed the avant-garde, an expression which first came into existence in the cultural sense in the latter part of the nineteenth century.¹⁷ The term resulted from strong reactions to the naturalist and realist Théâtre Libre founded by Antoine in 1887. These reactions took various forms from the "pièces à thèse" of Curel, Herveu and Brieux to the psychological dramas of Porto-Riche and Bernstein.¹⁸ And of course the supreme refutation of the bourgeois theatre was Jarry's Ubu Roi in 1896.

The avant-garde was not a school, nor did it necessarily involve a particular group of artists. Etymologically speaking, the term is, of course, a military one; but extended to a literary sense the avant-gardiste would be any artist who "sticks his neck out", so to speak, or goes against, yet ahead, of the establishment of the literary world. As Roland Barthes put it;

L'avant-garde, ce n'est au fond qu'un

phénomène cathartique de plus, une sorte de vaccine destinée à inoculer un peu de subjectivité, un peu de liberté sous la croûte de valeurs bourgeoises. . . .¹⁹

Together with the literary life of the cafés, the avant-garde began to become a way of life for many artists. The atmosphere of the cafés bred such a concept as the avant-garde, and by 1900 many of the foremost literary and artistic figures of Paris were frequenting them daily: Jarry, Picasso, Matisse, Apollinaire, for example. Men began to live not only for their art but to live in it. Eccentricity almost became mandatory and artists tended to accept as their prototype Alfred Jarry who, since the apparition of *Père Ubu* first took to the stage in 1896, had adopted the mannerisms of his anti-hero down to the minutest detail. Jarry literally lived in his literature and towards the end of his life he was seldom able to distinguish between himself and his creation.

Another trend that separated the avant-gardistes from their predecessors was the apparent simplicity of the works themselves.²⁰ This simplicity was an admiration of and subsequent regression to childhood, a trait discernible in many of the arts of the period. Henri Rousseau, at first accused of "primitivism" was soon heralded for his insights into subject, color and form. What appeared at first to be lack of maturity was before long realized to constitute "the universe of a grown-up child."²¹ Cubism was named after the most basic of children's toys and many of Picasso's tableaux were fashioned after well-known circus characters. André Billy had described Apollinaire as a "poète-enfant."²² "Simplicity" was not at all equated with "simpleness" which is lack of depth or meaning. It was thought that

there was a child-like quality in everyone that just needed to be brought out and guided.

The third trait of the avant-garde was the device of humour beginning to be used exhaustively as an artistic technique at this period. Many thinkers such as Henri Bergson were attempting an analysis of what constituted laughter and humour.²³ With the advent of Freudian and especially Bergsonian theories laughter was analyzed on a scientific basis. What the resulting investigations revealed was what André Breton was to call "humour noir"²⁴ signalling a kind of "danger of mirth."²⁵ This danger, translated into Bergson's terms was a reflection of the fear expressed in the gesture of laughter. It reflected society's unconscious tendency to be suspicious of all inelasticity of character, mind and body: "toute raideur du caractère, de l'esprit et même du corps, sera donc suspecte à la société, parce qu'elle est le signe possible d'une activité qui s'endort et aussi d'une activité qui s'isole, qui tend à s'écarter du centre commun autour duquel la société gravite, d'une excentricité enfin."²⁶

Bergson saw this tendency as the eventual cause of the destruction of a society which depended for its existence on an increasingly delicate adjustment of wills which fit more and more perfectly into each other²⁷ - in other words a complete elasticity in society. Laughter in this instance is the result of a recognition and subsequent fear of the possibilities of "raideur" or "excentricité" within society and an attempt to correct these eccentricities.

The corrective aspect of humour is very evident in much of

Apollinaire's work and especially in Les Mamelles de Tirésias with reference to the premises made in the Preface. Apollinaire states that the play will be serious, having repopulation as its subject:

Il a [. . .] pour but de mettre en relief
une question vitale pour ceux qui entendent
la langue dans laquelle il est écrit: le
problème de la repopulation [. . .] Le
sujet est si émouvant à mon avis, qu'il
permet même que l'on donne au mot drame son
sens le plus tragique.²⁸

The theme of repopulation might be interpreted as Bergson's "rigidity" in need of laughter to correct the situation. The fear that the French might be dwindling in numbers was in itself nonsensical and as such caused laughter. But Apollinaire was in actuality looking for a mirthful response:

La faute est plus grave, le vice est plus
profond, car la vérité est celle-ci; on
ne fait plus d'enfants en France parce
qu'on n'y fait pas assez l'amour. Tout
est là.²⁹

Aside from the obvious tongue-in-cheek nuance of this statement the advice is especially comical in the light of Apollinaire's life. For he himself was constantly in the throes of some eventually fruitless (ie. childless) love affair and often expressed his longing for a large family.

Another characteristic of the humour during this period has to do with Kierkegaard's philosophy of the tri-stage development of man's character. The Danish philosopher, mainly in his works Either/Or: A Fragment of Life, 1843 and Fear and Trembling, 1843, suggested that human development is divided into three stages of evolution: the aesthetic stage, characterized by a recognition of beauty and a cons-

tant search for novelty, the ethical stage, characterized by a recognition of "the sphere of duty, of universal rules, of unconditional demands and tasks"³⁰ and the religious stage, the ultimate evolution "qui donne à la vie un concept d'éternité."³¹ However, in order to make the transformation from the ethic to the religious, it is necessary to pass through an intermediary stage - that of humour. It comes, as René Massat suggests, when a man questions the real goal of life: is it contained within the sphere of duty or does it go beyond such a short vision?³² The resulting conflict produces humour, which, to use Bergson's terms again, is a humour of the realization of the rigidity and inelasticity of the ethical stage: "il accède alors au stade humoristique et adopte spontanément l'attitude de celui qui a décélé le ridicule d'une conception qui considère le stade éthique comme suprême".³³

Such is the position of Alfred Jarry who, fully realizing the ineptness of a temporal approach to life, mocked accepted notions of time and space. Apollinaire too, recognized the impossibility of finding absolutes in such immoveable and rigid things; in almost all his poetry he adopted a kind of cinematographic viewpoint which essayed to present several images simultaneously. In Les Mamelles de Tirésias this simultaneity took the form of visual puns which expressed the inherent ambiguity of both words and action. Thus one sees Thérèse, in a cathartic feminist gesture, loosing red and blue balloons from her blouse in a renunciation of her feminine status. Ironically the visual image produced reminds one of Marianne, the girl-symbol of France. Or one sees Presto and Lacouf duel to the

death over the question of whether they are in Paris or Zanzibar. With the connotation of the word "zanzibar" (that is, the place versus the game), one realizes that Apollinaire has purposefully put the concept of place into ridicule.

A fourth trend which separated the avant-gardistes from their predecessors was the new interest in the realms of the supernatural and especially of the dream. Borrowed mainly from the work of the psycho-analysts, this penchant saw artists attempting to create a "waking-dream". Probably the greatest reason for this is related to their sincere desire to get to the "root" of the human conscience. One's conscious activities are only surface activities and are often quite different from one's subconscious which regulates dreams. "Il n'y a que l'inconscient qui ne mente pas"³⁴ according to Marcel Raymond, and in this lies the reason for the flurried activity of automatic writers in the time of the dadaists and surrealists. An earlier example is Apollinaire's "Onirocritique", a prose poem written in 1908. In this "dream critique" there is no narrative line, nor is there any distinct theme. Only impressions are given - impressions of being nowhere in particular but everywhere at once, and above all an impression of the complete freedom of a dream-world: "je me sentis libre, libre comme une fleur en sa saison."³⁵

For Jarry, the waking dream was induced by alcohol and drugs when he could afford them. Jarry " . . . pushed systematic absurdity into the realm of hallucination, of violated consciousness"³⁶ until the hallucination could no longer be separated from his waking self, his real world. But as his ultimate goal, Jarry was searching,

as were his contemporaries, for a "real" truth, a "real" reason for existence. This they were certain could be found in the subconscious and expressed in entirely new art forms.

The four preceding traits of the avant-garde artists are in a sense summed up in a fifth - the trend of questioning all things which were previously taken for granted. All so-called "laws of art" were re-examined and most were consequently discarded. What resulted was a realization that there are no absolute laws of art, that different ideas, words and things can take on different meanings in the same context. However, the resulting equivocation was not necessarily pejorative; indeed often it was desirable. The pun took on a new status in literature and the avant-gardistes saw in ambiguity not a source of obscurity but rather a chance to give many impressions (each of them clear and valid in itself) with one word or idea. Now a heightened form of humour the pun had the ability to juxtapose things and ideas which created entirely new associations. Apollinaire used this technique extensively as will be seen in later chapters.

Thus the total impression one receives of these "Banquet Years" is in itself one of ambiguity. It is difficult to isolate any other one phrase which might serve to characterize the era for that would refute the principles of the artists themselves. As a result of the constant self-questioning and of the reversal of laws and meanings, one is faced not with distinct literary "isms" but with a refusal to form any such "isms". Literature was a part of life, a way of life, and the two were inseparable. "Anything may become its

opposite; not literature, but living is the supreme pun; writing is a slip of the tongue."³⁷

NOTES

¹Valentine Penrose, "Guillaume Apollinaire Horoscope," written for an Apollinaire exhibition by the Institute of Contemporary Art, "Portrait of a Man in a Hurry," (London, 1968).

²Roger Shattuck, The Banquet Years, (New York, 1968), p. 253.

³Emmanuel Aegerter and Pierre Labracherie, Guillaume Apollinaire, (Paris, 1943), p. 8.

⁴P. Fort and L. Mandin, Histoire de la Poésie Française depuis 1850, (Paris, 1926), p. 308.

⁵Pierre-Marcel Adéma, Guillaume Apollinaire, (Paris, 1968), p. 346.

⁶Shattuck, op. cit., p. 254.

⁷Margaret Davies, Apollinaire, (Edinburgh and London, 1964), p. 1.

⁸Guillaume Apollinaire, "L'Esprit Nouveau et les Poètes," Oeuvres complètes de Guillaume Apollinaire, (Paris, 1965), III, pp. 909-910. (Subsequent references to Apollinaire's work are taken from this edition unless otherwise noted. Abbreviation: O. C.)

⁹Davies, op. cit., loc. cit.

¹⁰Francis J. Carmody, The Evolution of Apollinaire's Poetics, 1901-1914, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1963), p. 1.

¹¹Apollinaire termed it "surréaliste" but without the implications that the word later had in the 1920's.

¹²Shattuck, op. cit., pp. 5-6.

¹³Christian Sénéchal, Les Grands Courants de la Littérature Contemporaine, (Paris, 1934), p. 15.

¹⁴"Les Peintres Cubistes: Méditations Esthétiques," O.C., Vol. 4, p. 24.

¹⁵Sénéchal, op. cit., p. 8.

¹⁶A.E. Carter, The Idea of Decadence in French Literature, 1830-1900, (Toronto, 1958), p. 144.

¹⁷Thomas Bishop, "Changing Concepts of the Avant-Garde in XXth Century Literature," French Review, 38 (October 1964), p. 34.

¹⁸André Muller, "Points de Repère," Théâtre Populaire, May 1, 1956, p. 4.

¹⁹Roland Barthes, "A l'avant-garde de quel théâtre?" Théâtre Populaire, May 1, 1956, p. 2.

²⁰The first four characteristics of the avant-garde listed here are those suggested by Shattuck, The Banquet Years, pp. 29-42.

²¹Shattuck, op. cit., p. 32.

²²André Billy, Avec Apollinaire, Souvenirs Inédits, (Paris-Genève, 1966), p. 14.

²³For a bibliography of works on laughter and comedy between 1873 and 1921 see Henri Bergson's Oeuvres, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959, pp. 384-385.

²⁴Anthologie de l'Humour Noir, (Paris, 1940).

²⁵David Grossvogel, 20th Century French Drama, (New York and London, 1961), p. 2.

²⁶Henri Bergson, Oeuvres, (Paris, 1959), p. 396.

²⁷Ibid., loc. cit.

²⁸O.C., Vol. 3, pp. 609-610.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 611-612.

³⁰Alasdair MacIntyre, "Soren Aabye Kierkegaard," The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Paul Edwards, (New York and London, 1967), Vol. 4, p. 338.

³¹René Massat, Preface to Oeuvres Complètes d'Alfred Jarry, (Lausanne, 1948), Vol. 4, p. 15.

³²Ibid., loc. cit.

³³Ibid., loc. cit.

³⁴Marcel Raymond, De Baudelaire au surréalisme, (Paris, 1940), p. 273.

³⁵Guillaume Apollinaire, "Onirocritique," Il y a, (Paris: Editions Messein, 1949), p. 184.

³⁶Shattuck, op. cit., p. 34.

³⁷Ibid., p. 241.

CHAPTER II

ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENTS AND TECHNIQUES WHICH INFLUENCED THE THEATRE 1887-1918

"L'art commence où finit
l'imitation."

[Pierre Albert-Birot]

The theatre that emerged in the midst of the ambiguity of the Banquet Years is as difficult to classify as the entire period itself. On the one hand, the new theatre of the avant-garde opposed the commercial theatres, the bourgeois "popular" theatres; on the other hand, the naturalist theatre was still much in vogue² together with the symbolist plays of Maurice Maeterlinck and Paul Claudel.

Yet the greatest paradox of the period is that, despite an enormous diversity in theories and influences, they existed simultaneously and to divorce them would result in a misrepresentation of the period. For although the theories were often incompatible, they nevertheless influenced each other profoundly. Indeed, Apollinaire himself, as late as 1917, wrote his symbolist drama, Couleur du Temps, even though his aesthetic concern tended to react against the basic premises of that movement: " . . . il y a des oeuvres remarquables dont le symbolisme justement prête à de nombreuses interpretations qui parfois se contrarient."³ Furthermore, his Casanova seems to have been an attempt to reproduce the lively atmosphere of the "théâtres du boulevard."

Realizing this, one must constantly guard against classifying too readily any artist of this period and especially Apollinaire. Instead, in order to understand more thoroughly the various dissimilarities of his three plays, it is necessary to sketch the total artistic climate of the era.

As Hugo's death signalled, in effect, the arrival of the twentieth century fifteen years early, so was 1887 a significant date in the development of the modern theatre. This was the date of the opening of the Théâtre Libre by Antoine whose aim was to encourage

young dramatists and to furnish a place for them to experiment. Because of the favourable reactions he had been receiving from such figures as Zola, Goncourt, and Coppée, Antoine ironically feared his theatre would become "une galerie de gens illustres" instead of "un refuge pour les jeunes et un laboratoire d'essai."⁴ This fear provoked a letter to Le Temps in which he made a public plea for contributions from young playwrights:

Eh bien, je ne [. . .] vois pas venir
[les jeunes], bien que je frappe partout,
dans les ateliers et dans les parlotes littéraires,
les cabarets et les petites chappelles. [. . .] N'avez-vous rien chez vous?
J'imagine que vous devez en recevoir par douzaines.⁵

In "Mes Souvenirs" sur le Théâtre Libre Antoine explained what initially prompted the creation of his "laboratoire d'essai." He realized the plight of the theatre, then in the throes of commercialism, and felt he could fill a long-standing vacancy for a "theatrical" theatre. Before 1870 and 1880, there had been an enormous revival of the plays of Hugo who had returned to Paris from exile. Moreover, the light comedies of manners of Augier, Dumas and Sardou, "la trinité illustre"⁶ were extremely popular and were to remain so until at least 1887 and the opening of the Théâtre Libre. In addition, the theatre-going public was very much enthralled with a relatively new genre, the so-called Vaudeville shows. Because they were saleable, these types of productions dominated the public whose main requirement was entertainment. And finally there was the naturalist theatre, an equally enormous box-office success. However much of the naturalist theatre relied too heavily on the reputation of the novels in the same vein

and indeed several of the plays were nothing more than converted novels (witness Zola's Thérèse Raquin or Flaubert's Salammbô).⁷

Although Antoine rarely condemned the various theatrical genres, he felt a need to create a new one (although one should be hesitant about calling the Théâtre Libre or its ideology a genre). Antoine's desire to create a new aesthetic of the theatre stemmed from what he called a "situation [. . .] curieuse: la génération précédente essoufflée, mais encore solidement épaulée par la camaraderie, et, en face, toute une jeunesse désarmée et rongant son frein."⁸

Antoine did succeed in resolving this situation inasmuch as he gave the theatre a new direction. He provided a channel through which young talent could work and in so doing gave playwrights such as Jules Lemaître and Georges Duhamel their start. Moreover, he introduced the works of many foreign playwrights, Ibsen and Strindberg to name just two, and thus provided novelty and diversity to theatre-goers.⁹ But probably foremost among his contributions was the creation of the idea of "little theatre" groups. Henceforth it was not imperative that a new theatre or troupe be backed by the Comédie Française or l'Odéon. Many works of those who were to become the most renowned dramatists at the turn of the century were produced at such "little theatres" (for example, Ubu Roi at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre in 1896). In this lies Antoine's greatest contribution for, even though the Théâtre Libre deteriorated into " . . . une esthétique dramatique qui, pour ne point assez varier, risquait de lasser le public"¹⁰, it still provided a point de repère for new ideas and

theories. In this sense, Antoine might be called the first avant-gardiste of the modern theatre.

By 1893 the Théâtre Libre had reached its apogee; its downfall was rapid. Antoine, who began the project with very little monetary support and finished with even less, resigned shortly before the group's fifty-fourth production, Le Missionnaire by Marcel Luguët. One can only speculate on the reasons for his leave-taking; he himself insisted it was mainly for monetary reasons:

Ici s'achève l'odyssée du Théâtre Libre;
parti sept ans auparavant de ma mansarde
de la rue de Dunkerque, avec quarante sous
dans la poche, pour aller répéter notre
premier spectacle chez ce petit marchand
de vin de la rue des Abesses, je me re-
trouve à Rome, avec à peu près la même
somme dans mon gousset entouré d'une
quinzaine de camarades déconfits autant
que moi, avec cent mille francs de dette
qui m'attendent à Paris, sans savoir ce
que nous ferons le lendemain.¹¹

However, although Antoine claimed that financial burdens were responsible for his failure, in fact his own approach to the theatre was by 1893 diametrically opposed to the premises on which he began. Early in the history of the Théâtre Libre, Antoine had insisted upon rigorous training and disciplining for his troupe, much in the same way as did Stanislavsky in Russia. This approach was successful for a time, but eventually it discouraged the creativity of the authors who, first enticed by the freedom offered by Antoine, were not suited for the mold into which he forced them. This mold was a strict sort of naturalism and, even though Antoine deplored the extravagant productions of Vaudeville, he himself fell into the trap of creating very exacting sets, mirror-like to the extent that his butcher shops had

real meat hanging from hooks.

Antoine's successor, Larochelle, tried vainly for two years to salvage the theatre but was finally forced to close its doors in 1896. The stage was ripe for someone to take Antoine's place. And as he had conceived the Théâtre Libre as a result of his refusal of contemporary theatres, so did others oppose his methods. One of the first to refute his overly-realistic tendencies was Paul Fort. In 1893, he opened the Théâtre d'Art which Sée classifies as "théâtre idéologique et symboliste."¹² Mostly in verse form, the plays were produced with a minimum of cost (out of necessity). Thus the décor was reduced greatly in importance often to just a few draperies and essential props. This may have been the beginnings of the so-called literary theatre, extending from Copeau to at least Giraudoux. Paul Fort can be considered an early avant-gardiste in the same sense as Antoine for they both refuted the accepted modes of production.

However, the contributions of Jacques Copeau to the modern theatre were considerably more far-reaching than those of either Antoine or Fort. Like them, he was an avant-gardiste in that he reacted strongly against the existing theatre; Thomas Bishop says that "his profound reforming of the aesthetics of the French theatre is nothing less than a major milestone in the modern avant-garde movement."¹³ In an article entitled "Un Essai de Rénovation Dramatique," Copeau accused the contemporary theatre of "l'exhibitionnisme de toute nature parasitant un art qui se meurt."¹⁴ In the theatre all he found were "veulerie, désordre, indiscipline, ignorance et sottise, dédain de créateur, haine de la beauté; une production de plus en plus

folle et vaine, une critique de plus en plus consentante, un goût public de plus en plus égaré. . . ."15

This deplorable state was the extreme commercialism which both Antoine and Fort had noted but which neither had been successful in combatting completely. Both men were forced to abandon their original ideals by lack of finances and public support. Of the three, Copeau was the only one who was able to withstand these kinds of difficulties long enough to have a lasting effect on the theatre.

From the outset he was a man of extraordinary clear-sightedness, and was able to recognize the many weaknesses of the contemporary theatre. He believed the stage needed, not extensive innovations in lighting and machinery but a return to the pure poetry of the classical theatre. Not that Copeau intended to "modernize" the classical plays - far from it. The texts could not be improved upon and anyone entertaining such "fantaisies"¹⁶ only detracted from the eternal truths that the plays were expressing: "toute l'originalité de notre interprétation, si on lui en trouve, ne viendra que d'une connaissance approfondie des textes."¹⁷ Copeau felt that the classical repertory had been unjustly ignored by the public in favour of the commercial tradition. In his essay "Lieux Communs" published in L'Ermitage in 1905, he described the false goals to which contemporary directors and authors had fallen prey. The most paradoxical situation in the theatre occurred when a playwright was seized with "inspiration dramatique"¹⁸ for, if he allowed himself to be overwhelmed by it, " . . . il sera réduit, assurément, à la capitulation ou à la famine."¹⁹ Knowing this, the artist avoids the problem by compromising with the commer-

cial demands of the public. The resulting situation is self-perpetuating with the constant preoccupation of "ma pièce fera-t-elle de l'argent ou non?"²⁰

In addition, playwrights, no longer creating to fulfil any particular moral aesthetic, wrote for the actors who would be playing the roles instead of the actor as a vehicle for the words of the play. The idea of a "star", so entrenched in the minds of the public, overshadowed the importance of the author, until the actors became "les seuls créateurs."²¹

Copeau saw money at the root of the theatre's evil. By returning to a classical repertory, he saw ways of eliminating this problem. By choosing already well-known plays, he thought that new methods of production were unnecessary; he was not trying to revolutionize the theatre ("nous ne sentons pas le besoin d'une révolution"²²) but to shift the emphasis to the text rather than the production. Copeau saw the actor as the motor for this transmission of words and thus elevated the actor's role. He tried to rid the theatre of the notion of a "star" whose reputation is established before he sets foot on stage. Acting was a full-time vocation and involved total environmental training. In some aspects, Copeau's actor was the "dehumanized" being so important to Apollinaire's later definition of an artist in Les Peintres Cubistes, to Artaud's "effigie spectrale"²³ and even to Jarry's puppet theatre theories.²⁴ As such, it is not surprising that Copeau advocated the use of masks at L'Ecole du Vieux-Colombier where one of the prime requisites for his students was the making of masks under the supervision of a sculptor.

By placing the emphasis on the actor, Copeau reduced the importance of the sets which he felt were superfluous to the production as a whole. The stage at the Vieux-Colombier was seldom dressed with more than a simple black backdrop, a few stairs, and the barest minimum of props: "que les autres prestiges s'évanouissent, et, pour l'oeuvre nouvelle, qu'on nous laisse un tréteau nu."²⁵ The interpretations of Molière by the Vieux-Colombier show the importance of absence of décor. For Molière, in the tradition of the commedia dell'arte, was also concerned with the ability of an actor to interpret the text. So much so that the success of his plays often depended on the lack of precise sets and the actors ability to suggest. Any play of Molière's, according to Marcel Raymond²⁶, lent itself to a Copeau interpretation because of the inherent qualities of ballet and movement. The text was so designed as almost to demand certain gestures and rhythmic movements to match the quality of the words. Or, as Ramon Fernandez concluded, " . . . le génie de Molière a consisté à faire coïncider l'effet moral avec l'effet physique, la danse avec la démonstration."²⁷ This commedia dell'arte spirit was part of "le jeu dramatique" to which Raymond refers²⁸ and which Apollinaire adopted in Casanova.

But in spite of his views on décor and on the actor, Copeau was far from dogmatic in his approach, for although he advocated a return to classical theatre, he felt this was only the beginning. Contemporary plays, if they met with his ideals of poetry, could be incorporated in this repertory in the future. What he did deplore was a systematization of rules or a stubborn refusal to recognize "tel ou tel aspect de la vérité humaine, telle ambition de la beauté."²⁹ Any

division of the theatre into genres would only take away from the infinite possibilities of the drama. To Copeau, the world was full of beauties and materials offered to the artist: "un poète seul peut [les] absorber, puis en restituer le chef d'oeuvre."³⁰ Apollinaire was no less conceited when he wrote:

Le poète, par la nature même de ses explorations, est isolé dans le monde nouveau où il entre le premier, et la seule consolation qu'il lui reste c'est que les hommes, finalement, ne vivant que de vérités, malgré les mensonges dont ils les matelasent, il se trouve que le poète seul nourrit la vie où l'humanité trouve cette vérité.³¹

As with most avant-gardistes, Copeau experienced more than just a little difficulty at the beginning of his career at the Vieux-Colombier. The first two plays, Thomas Heywood's Une femme tuée par la douceur and Molière's L'Amour Médecin, were, in terms of the demands of the commercial theatre, total failures. The critics came but most left before the end of the performance; the intellectual minority which Copeau hoped to attract followed suit. The absence of décor was thought to be caused by lack of funds. Yet Copeau persevered and for a year the Vieux-Colombier's reputation increased until it was forced to close its doors when World War I broke out. In 1920, after two unsuccessful seasons in New York, Copeau reopened his theatre for four triumphant years.

His greatest single contribution was the Ecole du Vieux-Colombier, a school which he operated from 1921-1929. It was here that he trained directors and actors in all aspects of theatrical production including gymnastics, mime, singing, puppetry, and a variety of

other disciplines. And it was here that he trained four of the most capable and gifted metteurs en scène of the twentieth century - Charles Dullin, Georges Pitoëff, Louis Jouvet and Gaston Baty, otherwise known as Le Cartel des Quatre. All found success in carrying out Copeau's high ideals and standards, if not his exact methods. In later years, Jean-Louis Barrault was apprenticed in Dullin's company and even though he strayed well into the world of elaborate sets and machinery that Copeau so abhorred, he admitted that he owed much to the master.³²

For the most part, however, Copeau was unsuccessful in terms of his own ideals. He never did find what he dreamed of most - a modern "classical" poet from whose writings he could draw his material. This failure was enough to cause him to retire from directing in 1924 but did not succeed in preventing his far-reaching influences on the modern theatre. Because he was not interested in hard and fast rules nor dogmatic schools or genres, his principles of the theatre were adaptable to many diverse ways of thinking. Thus the influences of this unbending "Flaubert of the stage"³³ cannot be underrated.

Another important artistic development of the period, although completely separate from Copeau's work, was the Cubist movement, unofficially launched with the chance rendez vous of Pablo Picasso and Guillaume Apollinaire in 1905. From entirely different backgrounds, the two soon discovered that their intentions to renovate the artistic world were remarkably similar. Picasso, impoverished since he had left Spain in 1901 had "drifted into circles where desperate immorality, wretchedness, and suffering were rampant"³⁴ and felt keenly the inadequacy of current art forms. He

sought an entirely different perspective from which to build a new art form. Apollinaire, in the meantime, had been occupied in leading the group of writers who had hailed Alfred Jarry's ideals of violent reaction against the bourgeoisie as their own. Both men were concerned with establishing an aesthetics which would have truth as its fundamental. Cubism was this fundamental.

Mockingly given its name by Matisse, the Cubist movement represented the sum of the thoughts of the "bateau lavoir" group, the core of the artistic bohemia of Paris. After Ubu Roi, it was almost unanimously agreed that what modern art lacked was a channel for the release of primitive emotions and feelings, basic to man's nature, but which had been allowed to remain latent. In 1902, small African figurines, carved by hand in a deceptively simple manner, began appearing in Paris. The appeal of these statues lay in what Lemaître described as "a direct suggestion of the most primitive instincts lying dormant at the bottom of our nature."³⁵ The simplicity of the African handiwork was discovered to be a skillful arrangement of geometric forms whose very straightforwardness suggested deep inner truths.

The rediscovery of geometry together with Max Jacob's unearthing of a portrait done by a Negro, whose decomposition and rearrangement of parts were totally foreign to French classical thought, were to serve as the starting point of the Cubist movement. By 1913 it had become the most notorious (and consequently the most successful) movement in the artistic world. Apollinaire and the literary figures who followed him did much to promote the Cubist theories not

only by writing manifestos and pamphlets for various showings, but also by incorporating the ideas into their own creations. For they realized, as did the painters, that relationships between things and ideas were not fixed and that infinite possibilities were made available to the artist who was willing to rearrange. Just as every viewpoint is personal, so should every piece of literature reflect that personality. No perspective is the correct one nor is any notion of the inter-relationship of things the correct one. Thus in Apollinaire's "Zone" one finds memories of a childhood intermingled with the reality of the present, woven together to predict the future:

A la fin tu es las de ce monde ancien

Bergère ô tour Eiffel le troupeau des ponts bête ce matin

Tu en as assez de vivre dans l'antiquité grecque et romaine

Ici même les automobiles ont l'air d'être anciennes
La religion seule est restée toute neuve la religion
Est restée simple comme les hangars de Port-Aviation
Seul en Europe tu n'es pas antique ô Christianisme³⁶

And in the same way in the later Les Mamelles de Tirésias, one sees two separate and unrelated events happening simultaneously on stage.

Apollinaire's Cubist techniques were carried to extremes in his collection Calligrammes. Not only did he attempt a Cubist effect through the ideas of the words themselves, but also through the visual arrangement of the words. One finds "La Pluie" depicted in several long slanted columns with the letters vertically arranged, or "La Cravate" in the shape of a tie, or a poem to Lou tracing the outline of one of her well-known portraits.

As the Cubist painters tended more and more towards abstractness, so did Apollinaire. His flair for automatic writing caused him

to turn out more and more manuscripts which at first seemed entirely disconnected but which, upon a second examination, revealed an almost uncanny ability to juxtapose unrelated fragments to produce a totally different image. Deciphering a poem by Apollinaire is rather like trying to fit together a jigsaw puzzle whose individual pieces do not at all resemble what the final picture will be.

But the situation in France was yet more complicated. Alongside Copeau, Vaudeville, Antoine and the Cubists were many foreign influences whose impact cannot be denied, notwithstanding Apollinaire's insistence on the unique genius of the French artistic mind:

. . . il n'y a guère de poètes aujourd'hui que
de langue française.

Toutes les autres langues semblent faire
silence pour que l'univers puisse mieux
écouter la voix des nouveaux poètes
français."³⁷

In England, Gordon Craig was attempting to de-emphasize the importance of the actor by developing a stylized method of production. He wanted a rigid control of sets (which were reduced to a symbolic minimum), lighting and the actor. His ideal actor was a mechanized one, a "super-marionette"³⁸ free from any human element other than that expressed by his mask.³⁹ In France this was paralleled by several theorists including Alfred Jarry (whose connection with marionettes will be discussed in a later chapter) and Antonin Artaud. In Le Théâtre et son Double, the latter discusses the actor's function as a mirror of an inner human life:

. . . il faut voir l'être humain comme un
Double

Spectre plastique et jamais achevé dont
l'acteur vrai singe les formes, auquel il
impose les formes et l'image de sa sensibilité.

C'est sur ce double que le théâtre influe,
cette effigie spectrale qu'il modèle. . . .⁴⁰

At the same time as Craig was putting his ideas to work in England, Adolphe Appia was practising similar theories in Switzerland. While emphasizing the basic element of acting, he wanted to "subordinate" it to a "rhythm of the whole, based on the text (spoken or musical),"⁴¹ much in the same ways as Copeau insisted on "une connaissance approfondie des textes."⁴² Along with Craig, Appia developed very stylized sets often reduced to a series of geometric lines and lighting.

In Russia, the founding of the Moscow Art Theatre by Stanislavsky and Dantchenko in 1898 led to a new kind of naturalism (although Stanislavsky preferred the term "realism"⁴³). However, "realism" for Stanislavsky did not necessarily imply the realistic sets that Antoine employed at the Théâtre Libre. Stanislavsky's realism produced a new type of characterization which "would enable the actor to react as he would if he were actually the character rather than the player."⁴⁴ Through the use of emotional and sensory stimuli, the actor was thus able to perform a wide range of plays. Indeed, Stanislavsky was successful in producing both strictly naturalist plays (for example, Maxim Gorki's The Lower Depths in 1902) and symbolist dramas (Maeterlinck's L'Oiseau Bleu in 1908).

Also from Russia came another important influence - one which affected Apollinaire directly. In 1909, Serge de Diaghilev brought

his Ballets Russes to Paris where they were to continue triumphantly until 1929. In Russia, Diaghilev had been celebrated for his ingenious melange of all art forms, including the works of some of the most famous Russian poets, painters and musicians. In France he carried on this tradition working closely with such figures as Eric Satie, Stravinsky, Poulenc, Picasso and especially Jean Cocteau with whom he collaborated on several occasions.

The innovations that the Ballets Russes brought to Paris were primarily in the realm of the mise-en-scène. Diaghilev was truly dedicated to a "rethéâtralisation" of the theatre in the sense that he wanted to create an all-enveloping milieu of artistic media, luxurious in dimension, colour and sound. This started a trend away from the pure literary theatre of Jacques Copeau as well as from the naturalist theatre whose champions had abhorred the use of painted scenery. Diaghilev's first success was Stravinsky's L'Oiseau de feu in 1910 which "started a reversal of the theatre's hostile attitude toward the use of painted scenery ever since the advent of realism."⁴⁵ In 1917, a month before Les Mamelles de Tirésias was played, Diaghilev's techniques were incorporated in Cocteau's Parade, termed by Arnold Haskell "a violent cubist manifesto, relieved only by flashes of real humour."⁴⁶ This play, for which Apollinaire wrote a program note, established not only cubism as an artistic movement in fields other than painting but also Cocteau's reputation and that of Eric Satie, who provided the musical score. The Ballets Russes completed Cocteau's ideal of a "poésie du théâtre" and, in spite of Parade's poor critical reception, Cocteau was closer to creating the entirely

anti-realistic atmosphere for which he strived. Apollinaire as well sought a synthesis of the arts in Les Mamelles de Tirésias and Casanova. In the program note to Cocteau's Parade also he applauded

" . . . cette alliance de la peinture et de la danse, de la plastique et de la mimique qui est le signe de l'avènement d'un art plus complet."⁴⁷

And yet, most of the Parisian public was not ready for the intellectual developments of the avant-garde and it must be made clear that the omnipresent théâtres du boulevard had continued to enjoy immense popularity since the mid-nineteenth century. It was this that caused the repulsion of Copeau, Antoine and other avant-gardistes who were forever battling the commercial aspect of what they considered to be a sacred art. But the French, an obstinate theatre public, preferred this easy-going kind of entertainment to one which challenged their minds. As Jacques Guicharnaud aptly puts it:

An audience is made up of people who are perpetually concerned with the problems of their everyday lives and are therefore infinitely more amused by what reassures and upholds them in their own realms than by any offer of an opening onto something else. Their realms consist of the ready-made vision each one has of himself and of life, as well as the conception, also ready-made, of the art forms which express that vision.⁴⁸

What was required was a force much more powerful than any existing theatrical forms which would supply this intellectual vacuity: Alfred Jarry, whose life and works began to be prominent in 1896 with the production of Ubu Roi, became that force and was the

catalyst for an artistic movement that extended from the turn of the century until the beginnings of the theatre of the absurd.

NOTES

¹Pierre Albert-Birot, SIC, I (janvier 1916).

²For example, Zola's Thérèse Raquin enjoyed a long run of fourteen presentations at l'Odéon as late as 1905.

³Apollinaire, Preface to Les Mamelles de Tirésias, O.C., Vol. 3, p. 610.

⁴André Antoine, Le Théâtre, (Paris, 1932-33), Vol. 1, p. 210.

⁵Ibid., loc. cit.

⁶André Antoine, "Mes Souvenirs" sur le Théâtre Libre, (Paris, 1921), p. 6.

⁷A brief résumé of the state of the theatre around 1870-1890 is given by Antoine in "Mes Souvenirs" sur le Théâtre Libre, pp. 6-9. Jacques Guicharnaud provides a brief summary of the influences of the Vaudeville theatre in Modern French Theatre from Giraudoux to Genet, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967, pp. 2-4.

⁸Antoine, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

⁹Francis Pruner in his work Le Théâtre Libre d'Antoine, Vol. 1, (Le Répertoire Etranger) discusses at length the various foreign playwrights that were produced at the Théâtre Libre including Tolstoy, Verga, Ibsen, Strindberg, Björnsen, Heijermans and Hauptmann.

¹⁰Edmond Sée, Le Théâtre Français Contemporain, (Paris, 1928), p. 25.

¹¹Antoine, op. cit., p. 313.

¹²Sée, op. cit., p. 100.

¹³T. Bishop, op. cit., p. 37.

¹⁴Jacques Copeau, Critiques d'un Autre Temps, (Paris, 1923), p. 233.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 233-234.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 241.

¹⁷Ibid., loc. cit.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 226.

¹⁹Ibid., loc. cit.

²⁰Ibid., loc. cit. One cannot help thinking here of Apollinaire's preface to Les Mamelles de Tirésias in which he protested " . . .

contre ce théâtre en trompe-l'oeil qui forme le plus clair de l'art théâtral d'aujourd'hui." (O.C., Vol. 3, p. 612). Like Copeau, he recognized that the theatre was in need of "sinon une rénovation" (ibid., p. 609), at least a return to the basic exigencies of the classical theatrical art: "[cet art dramatique] ouvre carrière à l'imagination du dramaturge, qui rejetant tous les liens qui avaient paru nécessaires ou parfois renouant avec une tradition négligée, ne juge pas utile de renier les plus grands d'entre ses devanciers." (ibid., p. 613).

²¹Copeau, op. cit., p. 227.

²²Ibid., p. 243.

²³Antonin Artaud, Le Théâtre et son Double, Oeuvres Complètes, (Paris, 1964), Vol. 4, p. 156.

²⁴These considerations will be treated in later chapters.

However, following are specific references made by these three authors on this subject: Apollinaire, Les Peintres Cubistes: Méditations Esthétiques (abbrev., Les Peintres Cubistes), O.C., Vol. 4, p. 17; Artaud, Le Théâtre et son Double, Oeuvres Complètes, (Paris, 1964), Vol. 4, pp. 156-157; Jarry, "De l'inutilité du théâtre au théâtre," Oeuvres Complètes, (Lausanne, 1948), Vol. 4, p. 164-165.

²⁵Copeau, op. cit., p. 249.

²⁶Marcel Raymond, Le Jeu Retrouvé, (Montréal, 1943), p. 30.

²⁷Ramón Fernandez, Vie de Molière, (Paris, 1929), p. 38.

²⁸Raymond, op. cit., p. 33.

²⁹Copeau, op. cit., p. 225.

³⁰Ibid., loc. cit.

³¹"L'Esprit Nouveau et les Poètes," O.C., Vol. 3, p. 908.

³²Joseph Chiari, The Contemporary French Theatre: The Flight from Naturalism, (London, 1958), p. 90.

³³Ibid., p. 86.

³⁴Georges Lemaître, From Cubism to Surrealism in French Literature, (Cambridge, Mass., 1941), p. 73.

³⁵Ibid., p. 76.

³⁶"Zone," O.C., Vol. 3, p. 55.

³⁷"L'Esprit Nouveau et les Poètes," O.C., Vol. 3, p. 908.

³⁸John Gassner, Form and Idea in Modern Theatre, (New York, 1956), p. 95.

³⁹Ibid., p. 22.

⁴⁰Artaud, op. cit., p. 156.

⁴¹Jacques Guicharnaud, Modern French Theatre from Giraudoux to Genet, (New Haven and London, 1967), p. 300.

⁴²Copeau, op. cit., p. 241.

⁴³Gassner, op. cit., pp. 28-29.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 29.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 403.

⁴⁶Arnold Haskell, Diaghileff, His Artistic and Private Life, (London, 1955), p. 298.

⁴⁷"Parade," O.C., Vol. 4, p. 444.

⁴⁸Guicharnaud, op. cit., p. 2.

CHAPTER III

THE AESTHETIC RELEVANCE OF ALFRED JARRY

"L'esprit si particulier de Jarry,
son désir d'étonner et de décon-
certer, trouve en Apollinaire un
écho complaisant . . . "1

[Marcel Adéma]

Of all the artists of this period there is probably none more representative than Alfred Jarry. He was at once child-like yet complex in an apparent but deceptive simplicity; he saw humour, albeit a "black humour", in the absurdity of man's condition which he attempted to reveal through shock tactics; he not only questioned existing "laws of art", he invented a discipline for the explanation of "non laws of art" - Pataphysics. And most important of all, Alfred Jarry's life was truly fused with his art to the extent that the two were virtually inseparable. Apollinaire once said that Jarry was an " . . . homme de lettres comme on l'est rarement [parce qu'] il était fondé en lettres et en cela seulement."² It is almost absurd to call Jarry an eccentric for the term is only valid in relation to a bourgeois system of morals and behaviour and this was opposed to his whole philosophy. For Jarry, the only evidence required to render any idea or object valid was its existence. Anything was possible and therefore probable - an element essential to the poet's science of Pataphysics. The peculiar logic of this invention is reflected in the following observation:

Au lieu d'énoncer la loi de la chute des corps vers un centre, que ne préfère-t-on celle de l'ascension d'un vide vers une périphérie, le vide étant pris pour unité de non-densité, hypothèse beaucoup moins arbitraire que le choix de l'unité concrète de densité positive eau?³

When Apollinaire first met Alfred Jarry in 1903 at the café Soleil d'Or, he was young and impressionable, a perfect target for the colourful figure of Jarry. The effects of the latter on Apollinaire were immediate and permanent and no other artist of the period in-

fluenced Apollinaire more. The early years of the century were a time of vast experimentation for Apollinaire who was in the process of developing his own aesthetics. His natural penchant for the bizarre was encouraged by Jarry's whole way of life, a life of which Apollinaire later wrote: "ses moindres actions, ses gamineries, tout cela, c'était de la littérature."⁴ From the time of their first meeting, the two artists became close friends. In a letter to James Onimus in 1904, Apollinaire spoke of Jarry, along with Charles-Henry Hirsch, as "exquis" and as "mes amis littéraires les plus sincères."⁵ In 1909, two years after Jarry's death, Apollinaire wrote a penetrating analysis of the singular importance of Jarry:

On ne possède pas de terme qui puisse s'appliquer à cette allegresse particulière où le lyrisme devient satirique, où la satire, s'exerçant sur la réalité, dépasse tellement son objet qu'elle le détruit et monte si haut que la poésie ne l'atteint qu'avec peine, tandis que la trivialité ressortit ici au goût même, et, par un phénomène inconcevable, devient nécessaire. Ces débauches de l'intelligence où les sentiments n'ont pas de part, la Renaissance seule permet qu'on s'y livrât, et Jarry, par un miracle, a été le dernier de ces débauchés sublimes.⁶

Jarry lived his philosophy to its extremes from 1896 (the first presentation of Ubu Roi) until his death. Little of his earlier life has been documented except with relation to his later literary life.⁷ This is surprising considering that the logic of Jarry's own life and works seems to have been influenced directly by the maternal side of his family. His mother, from a bourgeois family of high standing, had married "out of her class" so to speak, into a family of workers. Although Jarry appeared to mock both his mother

and father, it was to the former's way of life that he constantly aspired. He once explained the difference between his parents to Mme de Rachilde, his closest friend:

Notre père était un bougre dénué d'importance, ce qu'on appelle un bien brave homme. [. . .] Notre mère était une demoiselle de Coutouly, petite et rablée, volontaire et pleine de fantaisie, que nous fûmes obligé[s] d'approuver avant d'avoir voix au chapitre. [. . .] Elle faisait, comme toutes les femmes, le désespoir de son mari, qui avait peut-être, lui, le grand tort de ne pas employer la matraque, et nous avons l'impression que nous fûmes conçu[s], en tout bien tout honneur, la nuit où cette créature d'un sexe un peu différent se mit dans l'entendement d'aller courir au bal en y traînant un taureau par les cornes.⁸

The bourgeois aspects of his mother to which Jarry aspired were, however, unorthodox in themselves, Caroline Quernest Jarry loved to create scandal and attract attention much in the same way as her son was to scandalize his peers in the artistic world. His fondest memory of her was a photograph which showed her " . . . en torero, culotte courte, petit casaquin brodé d'or à grelots et, sur le coin de la tempe, une toque à velours."⁹ What better way to pay his mother tribute than to copy her life styles; his costume was the cape, the trousers tucked into his socks, and the perpetual revolver at his side.

And if Mme Jarry's comportment was not enough to justify Jarry's, one has only to trace his heredity further back. His grandmother spent most of her life in an insane asylum and was released for only short periods of time which she spent with Caroline and her family. Jarry's uncle was also described by Chauveau to be "presque

fou"¹⁰ Even his mother's behaviour often did not escape accusations of insanity.¹¹ In terms of his family, then, Jarry was fully worthy of the many doubts concerning his own state of mind. Therefore, both environmental and possibly hereditary factors from Jarry's family background might have been responsible for his peculiar brand of insanity. Who else would reply to an anxious mother's worry that one of Jarry's random bullets might hit her child: "Eh! [. . .] qu'à cela ne tienne, Madame, nous vous en ferons d'autres?"¹² Who else, during a performance for Les Travaux d'Hercule, would call out just loud enough to be heard: "je ne comprend pas qu'on laisse entrer dans une salle de théâtre les spectateurs des trois premiers rangs avec des instruments de musique?"¹³

And yet from the time the first "Merdre!" was uttered at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre in 1896, there was something formidably logical about Jarry's whole life process. He set out to destroy, to demolish anything of accepted existence and validity. Formal schools and laws of art were one of his prime targets as were such seemingly indivisible things as shapes of objects:

Pourquoi chacun affirme-t-il que la forme d'une montre est ronde, ce qui est manifestement faux, puisqu'on lui voit de profil une figure rectangulaire étroite, elliptique de trois quarts, et pourquoi diable n'a-t-on noté sa forme qu'au moment où l'on regarde l'heure?¹⁴

But his destruction was scientific and deliberate however haphazard it may have seemed at first. Jarry rarely planned anything; his life was made up of a series of unrelated episodes with his changing of abodes, friends and ideals frequently. Not untrustworthy he never-

theless could not be counted on to show up for any appointment.

The most disturbing part about his life was that it was absurd yet systematically so. His Ubuesque manner of speech in which he placed equal stress on each syllable was preconceived to measure its effects on the listener. To whatever extent it did affect him it satisfied some of Jarry's inner need to destroy the listener's expected notions of conversation. His rebelliousness reached its height with the slow suicide that was to be his fate. George Wellwarth sees in this a deliberate, calculated attempt to create a living example of his philosophy on life (and, paradoxically, death).¹⁵ The decision to drink himself slowly to death was Jarry's ultimate gesture of rebellion. Any other way would have prevented him from carrying on his "eccentricities undisturbed by the restraints of his own personality."¹⁶ Jarry knew he would die young (a diet of ether and absinthe not being conducive to longevity) and in this knowledge he felt he had gained total freedom. For by choosing one's own way and time of dying, one has conquered the feared institution of death itself. He had dictated what had been thought to be an ungovernable end to life.

From 1896 on, Jarry's desertion of a "normal" life pattern was manifested in his art. The creation of Père Ubu signalled the beginning of the most destructive force in Jarry's life. Jarry invented Père Ubu as an instrument of mockery against the bourgeoisie but he ironically finished by becoming himself that instrument. As the personage of Ubu began to take hold of Jarry's entire being, the personality of the creator slipped into obscurity. The identification was complete when Jarry ceased to distinguish between "him," "me" or "we".

The reputation of Père Ubu established, Jarry no longer had a reason for keeping his own identity. He died content to have created "le personnage le plus horrible de notre littérature."¹⁷

The desire to make of his life something monstrous and inhuman markedly resembled the themes which underlined most of his artistic endeavours. Holding human life in such low esteem, Jarry advocated that art do the same. The notion of identity was vain and non-functional to Jarry. A person was made up of several identities and it was impossible to distinguish them at any one time. In Beigbeder's phrase "il faut le [le personnage] chercher dans la décomposition qui la fait éclater."¹⁸

As a consequence, Jarry was a strong supporter of the use of masks to express what he considered to be the inner reality of the character on stage. The universality that the mask was supposed to represent was by no means new to the stage. But at Jarry's time the usage had become very rare partly because of the concept of the "star", which required that a particular famous actor's face be seen. Jacques Copeau urged the use of masks at the Vieux-Colombier but his advice did not diverge from traditional usage of masks; that is, a mask was to be a set expression of happiness, sadness, or some fixed emotion. In an essay entitled "De l'inutilité du théâtre au théâtre," Jarry scorned this traditional application of masks:

L'acteur devait substituer à sa tête au moyen d'un masque l'enfermant, l'effigie de PERSONNAGE, laquelle n'aura pas comme à l'antique, caractère de pleurs ou de rire (ce qui n'est pas un caractère), mais caractère du personnage.¹⁹

If the mask was successful in portraying the "eternal" character of the personage, it would then be very simple for the metteur en scène to use lights to emphasize singly the various aspects of the mask and thus the multiplicity of the character, " . . . parallèle au kaléidoscope et surtout au gyroscope."²⁰ In this way, the thought and reactions of the audience (whom Jarry mockingly described as a "troupeau"²¹) were directed in order to produce as closely as possible the reactions prescribed by the playwright:

Et pratiquement chaque spectateur voit le masque personnel d'une façon égale, avec des différences à coup sûr négligeables. . . .²²

In this kaleidoscopic milieu of lights, the actor plays a very important role, much in the same way as did Copeau's actor. He is important, not as a person playing a stage role, but as a porte-parole for the playwright's, or producer's, intentions. His movements and gestures are significant only insofar as they fulfil the functions of a character in a particular play. The precision required of Jarry's actor is to match the movements of the lights which particularize the various parts of the mask:

Par de lents hochements de haut en bas et bas en haut et vibrations latérales, l'action déplace les ombres sur toute la surface de son masque.²³

This idea would be echoed years later by Antonin Artaud, whose Théâtre de la Cruauté may have found its beginnings in Ubu Roi:

Le décor sera constitué par les personnages eux-mêmes, grandis à la taille de mannequins gigantesques, par des paysages de lumières mouvantes jouant sur des objets et des masques en perpétuel déplacement.²⁴

Jarry's desire to keep the personality of the actor out of his role was carried to extremes in his theories on voice. He suggested that the characters adopt completely monotone voices " . . . comme si la cavité de la bouche du masque ne pouvait émettre que ce que dirait le masque, si les muscles de ses lèvres étaient souples."²⁵

The origins of Jarry's ambition to ultimately dehumanize the actor date from his schoolboy days at the lycée at Rennes. It was there that the conception of Père Ubu first took root and grew into the stage character of 1896. The story has been retold many times and hardly needs more than a mention here.²⁶ Ubu took shape as a character in a puppet play which was intended as a mockery of the obese physics instructor at the lycée, Monsieur Hébert, nicknamed Père Hébé. For the students at the lycée, Hébé represented all that was corrupt and incompetent in the world; he was unable either to teach or discipline the boys and for this reason he was a perfect specimen for their puppet play. In the presentation that Jarry gave to the first audience of Ubu Roi, he described Ubu as a "fantoche, la déformation par un potache d'un de ses professeurs qui représentait pour lui tout le grotesque qui fût au monde."²⁷

The fascination that Jarry found in these first marionettes permeated the rest of his plays. For him, a puppet was the only way in which the personality of the actor could be totally eliminated from the stage interpretation. It was a literal dehumanization of the actor. This tradition of marionettes seemed to be for Jarry the recreation of the mythical origins of fairies, elves and the like who expressed the eternal truths of the first legends and fairy

tales.²⁸ This involved man's early attempts to explain nature by creating symbolic and somehow superhuman figures who peopled the early legends of man. Like them, the marionettes were restricted in the time and space in which they were situated. Their function was a purely temporal one as they had to fill a certain need in the time allotted. As Jarry saw it, this aspect of puppet theatre was an essential one in the process of dehumanization. The spectator was able to accept more readily this non-human world (and consequently the playwright's words) for he was not required to make a judgment on the actor himself, essentially nothing but a false schizophrenic stage being. In some ways this was very similar to Bertolt Brecht's theories of the Alienation Effect (Verfremdungseffekt). A play which is successful in producing the Alienation Effect creates a certain "detachment [. . .] which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar."²⁹ The German felt that a certain mental distance was necessary between the stage and the audience in order to prevent a sympathetic involvement or identification on the part of the spectator.

In order to produce A. Effects the actor has to discard whatever means he has learned of persuading the audience to identify itself with the characters which he plays. Aiming not to put his audience into a trance, he must not go into a trance himself.³⁰

The personage of Père Ubu was close enough to Artaud's dehumanized "mannequin gigantesque"³¹ to create the desired reaction in the spectator - shock. What caused this shock can be viewed on three levels. The first is the opening line itself of Ubu Roi, "Merdre!"

which was sufficient in itself to cause a total upheaval in the audience. David Grossvogel sees in the word "a brief but correct summation of a particular climate,"³² which is partly correct. For the word itself was not what disturbed the audience but the fact that someone had dared to speak it in public:

Les obscénités, les allusions scatologiques, la verveur de langage ne sont [. . .] pas tellement importantes, si ce n'est qu'elles vont à l'encontre des conventions établies sur la scène. Le public a protesté justement parce qu'on s'en prenait à ce qu'il a de plus cher, ses illusions.³³

Nor did the spectator have any recourse. Laughter was out of the question; the rules of the game had been challenged and the only means of escape was to fight back. This the spectators did with constant catcalls and jeers throughout the performance. That the audience recognized this challenge Jarry affirms in his essay "Questions du théâtre:"

J'ai voulu que, le rideau levé, la scène fût devant le public comme [un] miroir [. . .]; et il n'est pas étonnant que le public ait été stupéfait à la vue de son double ignoble, qui ne lui avait pas encore été entièrement présenté. [. . .] L'art et la foule étant si incompatibles, nous aurions, si l'on veut, eu tort d'attaquer directement la foule dans Ubu Roi; elle s'est fâchée parce qu'elle a trop bien compris, quoi qu'elle en dise.³⁴

The second level of shock produced is that the word "Merdre!" along with several other scatological references is carried on throughout the play with equal verve and enthusiasm. Jarry was not content to accept the initial moments of Ubu Roi as his success. He had to continue the attack until the turmoil in the audience had

ceased to be caused by the words themselves; now the spectator was incensed that Jarry dared to carry on the assault ad absurdum. Jarry had begun by performing the unexpected creating a scandal in so doing; he finished by overdoing the expected thus adding insult to injury.

Thirdly, the character of Père Ubu himself left a lasting impression on the audience who was not allowed to forget the original repulsion that Ubu first generated. For as Jarry began to realize the full impact that Ubu was having on the artistic world, he allowed the character to take a firm hold of his entire being. The ironic yet conscious identification of Jarry with Ubu was a clever weapon used to continue the assault begun in 1896 on the bourgeois public.

The reason for the lasting repulsion that the spectator felt for the Jarryesque monster is contained in the way that Père Ubu manifested his protests. The audience should have been warned by that first "Merdre!" for it was reminiscent of the only other class of society who would dare to utter such an insult with absolutely no qualms nor afterthought - children. This was what disturbed the already wary spectator the most. For a child can only be reprimanded; he cannot be prevented from liberating his natural exuberance. The unorthodox primitivism of Ubu was untouchable, his reputation safe within the walls of excrement he had built around it.

The child that was Ubu was not, however, the playful innocent that one associates with youth. His methods of rationalization were the same but nothing more. The passions that Ubu loosed on the stage were far beyond any for which a child could be responsible, although the logic and reasoning behind them were remarkably similar. The

decision made to become rich, Ubu takes the shortest route to his goal: "j'ai l'honneur de vous annoncer que pour enrichir le royaume je vais faire périr tous les Nobles et prendre leurs biens."³⁵ And he carries out his plan systematically and cold-bloodedly. Almost fifty years later a nearly identical statement was to be uttered by Camus' Caligula, who strangely resembles Père Ubu:

Messieurs, vous savez que les finances de l'Etat ne tenaient debout que parce qu'elles en avaient pris l'habitude. Depuis hier, l'habitude elle-même n'y suffit plus. Je suis donc dans la désolante nécessité de procéder à des compressions de personnel.³⁶

Ubu Roi was doubtless a great success notwithstanding the harsh judgments of several critics of the time. Edmond Sée in L'Europe Nouvelle called the play "une morne et lente farce d'écon-
lier,"³⁷ while Paul Souday in Paris-Midi grossly underrated the power of Jarry: "ce fameux Ubu-Roi, ce n'est pas grand'chose. . . ."³⁸ Even the modern critics have misinterpreted the play to some extent. David Grossvogel accused Jarry of relying "too exclusively"³⁹ on the "single trick"⁴⁰ of shock to produce laughter. He also reproached the Jarry plays for representing nothing more than "felicitous formalizations of the author's personality - an effort at self-projection."⁴¹ Henri Béhar, in less denunciatory terms, felt that Jarry had expected too much from the audience who were not yet ready for the extremes of the play: "on demandait au public de prendre ce qu'il voyait bien être une farce de collégien pour un chef-d'oeuvre de l'esprit nouveau, et il ne pouvait pas se laisser faire."⁴² Both critics felt that the author had not fulfilled his function as a

playwright and that his scandalous tactics were premature.

However, these allegations do not penetrate Jarry's real motives and intentions. Grossvogel mistakenly presumed that Jarry was attempting to evoke laughter when in fact the evidence is to the contrary. If laughter was produced at the first performance of Ubu Roi (and records indicate that there was more indignation than mirth)⁴³ it was probably a laughter of self-defense and not of mirth of enjoyment. Indeed, Jarry knew that the audience was neither able nor willing to recognize on the stage the reflection of "son double ignoble."⁴⁴ If there was humour in the Ubu plays, it was more the "humour noir" to which André Breton refers⁴⁵ and the resulting shock was far from producing laughter. "Humour noir" is not necessarily a source of laughter, and hence Ubu Roi is not responsible for the lack of it. In fact, humour, when not viewed as a source of laughter, is, according to Breton, a manifestation of "une révolte supérieure de l'esprit"⁴⁶ which is exactly the case with Père Ubu and Jarry. This revolt of the stage characters Jarry hoped to instil in the spectator much in the same way as the dadaists with their "spectacle-provocation"⁴⁷ did twenty years later. The suddenness and spontaneity which this was to occur would assemble the spectators in an anarchistic collectivity from which would result "un nouveau comique [qui] ne rassemble plus les spectateurs contre d'autres mais le déchaîne contre soi, contre sa logique."⁴⁸ This kind of objective humour in which an object is dissected, is explained by René Massat: "l'humour chez Jarry peut donc être considéré comme un phénomène semblable au phénomène alchimique de la dissociation des éléments."⁴⁹

Béhar too, with his charge that the audience was not ready for Ubu⁵⁰ did not fully realize the implications of the play. Paradoxically, Jarry depended on the audience's initial refusal of the play in order to carry out his original plan. To be a success, the play had to jolt the audience out of its seats. The desired effect was produced by the revised "mot de Cambronne" and Jarry had achieved his aim.

Far from being premature, Ubu Roi was an artistic and theatrical necessity to keep the theatre from being completely strangled by naturalism. The real destroyer of naturalism was Jarry and not Jacques Copeau as Marcel Raymond insisted.⁵¹ Henceforth the theatre would be concerned less and less with the descriptive exactness of the naturalists. A new dimension had been revealed, beyond even Copeau's perceptive revivals of the Classics. Margaret Davies pinpointed the key to Jarry's success:

The complete abolition of logic and representation, the installation of the absurd, the counterpoint on the theme of incongruity, the celebration of shock-tactics, the erection of fantasy and dream into solid sky-scrapers [. . .], these guiding principles of Surrealism and, even more recently, the theatre of the absurd, are all there fully developed in Jarry.⁵²

Although Père Ubu was too active a figure to parallel Beckett's Didi or Gogo, Ionesco's *Le Vieux* or *la Vielle*, he nevertheless can be considered as a precursor of the characters of the theatre of the absurd. Whereas in En Attendant Godot or Les Chaises the characters are powerless to choose their fates in the face of their own ineptness, in Ubu Roi, the hero profits by his ineptitude to manipulate

his destiny, however incongruous the situation might be.

This is what constitutes Jarry's own brand of absurdity - the juxtaposition of dissimilar elements purely on the grounds of chance. It is absurd that in the decor for Ubu Roi, one sees "des portes s'ouvrir sur des plaines de neiges sous un ciel bleu, des cheminées ornées de pendules se fendre afin de servir de portes, et des palmiers verdier au pied des lits, pour que les broutent de petits éléphants perchés sur des étagères,"⁵³ and yet, considering that these things could happen purely by chance, the situation is justified. The justification of absurd situations was Jarry's own invention; he dubbed it the science of Pataphysics: "la science des solutions imaginaires, qui accorde symboliquement aux linéaments les propriétés des objets décrits par leur virtualité."⁵⁴

One wonders, however, what Jarry's original motives were for creating such a science. The description of it seems to parallel the story of the poet's life. Jarry's world was made up of a continual series of dissociated elements which resembled the structure of a dream. The fact that such events were considered "abnormal" outraged Jarry. Such things were just as apt to occur as any others albeit unexpectedly. It was through an acceptance of the existence of such a world that Jarry hoped to explain "l'univers supplémentaire [. . .] univers que l'on peut voir et que peut-être l'on doit voir à la place du traditionnel."⁵⁵ Hence, in the macrocosm of a pataphysicist, there are no accepted absolutes (in the sense of indivisible truths); anything is possible, must be possible. Opposites fit together; nothing is ambiguous, or if it is, it is purposefully so.

Interpretations are infinite and there are no limits to time and space: "infinity of time and infinity of meaning determine the same visionary universe."⁵⁶ Under these rules the plausibility of the decor in Ubu Roi cannot be questioned and it is perfectly acceptable that the action "se passe on Pologne, c'est-à-dire Nulle-Part."⁵⁷

For Apollinaire, who took an active interest in Jarry's new science in its initial stages of formation⁵⁸, Pataphysics was translated into the theory of the "esprit nouveau", which was his justification of absurd situations. Like the Cubist painters, Apollinaire realized that a full understanding of a particular object or situation came only when viewed from all angles simultaneously. This simultaneity produced the surprise, or shock, so essential to "l'esprit nouveau": "la surprise est le grand ressort nouveau."⁵⁹

The impact of Jarry on Apollinaire cannot be underestimated. Apollinaire himself recognized this and upon Jarry's death he wrote:

Ubu Roi est un des chef-d'oeuvres comiques de la scène française. S'il a toute la force et toute la simplicité des bonnes lettres de l'antiquité, toute la truculence et tout le bon-sens des 'verolez très précieux' du seizième siècle, toute la vivacité, la netteté et le naturel du dialogue molièresque, toute la fantaisie et tout le lyrisme comique d'un Shakespeare, Ubu Roi a encore quelque chose qui en fait une oeuvre à part n'ayant d'analogue dans aucune littérature. Ce quelque chose était l'exceptionnelle personnalité de notre pauvre ami. . . .⁶⁰

Les Mamelles de Tirésias continued in 1917 what Jarry had begun with Ubu Roi. The audience was no less shocked at Apollinaire's play than they had been twenty years earlier at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre. The

critics of Les Mamelles de Tirésias, who were as severe as those of 1896, recognized the proximity of the two productions. La Griffe called Les Mamelles de Tirésias "du Jarry monmartrisé, modernisé, et martyrisé"⁶¹ while L'Heure remarked that " . . . c'est un art qui fait penser à Jarry, un Jarry à la 20^e puissance."⁶²

NOTES

¹Marcel Adéma, op. cit., p. 102.

²"Alfred Jarry," Il y a, (Paris, 1949), p. 176.

³Jarry, Gestes et Opinions du Docteur Faustroll, Oeuvres Complètes, (Lausanne, 1948), p. 218.

⁴Apollinaire, op. cit., loc. cit.

⁵O.C., Vol. 4, p. 718.

⁶"Alfred Jarry," Il y a, p. 176.

⁷The most important and thorough work done is probably Paul Chauveau's Alfred Jarry ou la Naissance, la Vie et la Mort du Père Ubu, Paris: Mercure de France, 1932.

⁸Mme de Rachilde, quoted by Jacques Henry Levesque in Alfred Jarry, Paris: Editions Pierre Séghers, 1951, p. 14.

⁹Ibid., loc. cit.

¹⁰Paul Chauveau, Alfred Jarry ou la Naissance, la Vie et la Mort du Père Ubu, (Paris, 1932), p. 30.

¹¹J.H. Levesque, Alfred Jarry, (Paris, 1951), p. 14.

¹²Quoted by André Breton in Anthologie de l'Humour Noir, p. 217.

¹³Quoted by Levesque, Alfred Jarry, p. 63.

¹⁴Jarry, op. cit., p. 218.

¹⁵George Wellwarth, The Theater of Protest and Paradox,
Developments in the Avant-Garde Drama, (New York, 1964), p. 11.

¹⁶Ibid., loc. cit.

¹⁷Henri Béhar, Etude sur le Théâtre Dada et Surréaliste,
(Paris, 1967), p. 38.

¹⁸Marc Beigbeder, Le Théâtre Français Depuis la Libération,
(Paris, 1959), p. 31.

¹⁹Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. 4, p. 164.

²⁰Ibid., loc. cit.

²¹Ibid., p. 165.

²²Ibid., loc. cit.

²³Ibid., loc. cit.

²⁴Artaud, op. cit., p. 150.

²⁵Jarry, op. cit., p. 166. Although Apollinaire never theorized on the merits of using masks, he nevertheless insisted that the actors in Les Mamelles de Tirésias wear them. He did not seem to know exactly what sort of masks would be appropriate, however, and he left the task of choosing them to Serge Férat to whom he wrote: "le cheval comme il est et le reste en masques, loups à ta volonté, ou grimes, ou chapeaux dans le genre de celui du gendarme." (G. Apollinaire, letter to Serge Férat, 1917, O.C., Vol. 4, p. 782).

²⁶See, for example, Grossvogel, 20th Century French Drama, p. 22; G. Lemaître, From Cubism to Surrealism in French Literature, pp. 56-57; Shattuck, The Banquet Years, pp. 189-190; René Massat, Preface to Jarry's Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. 4, pp. 9-10.

²⁷Jarry, Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. 4, p. 23.

²⁸I am indebted to René Massat who suggested the linkage between marionettes and myths in his preface to Jarry's O.C., Vol. VI, pp. 9-14. He says: "Alfred Jarry semble avoir trouvé dans le spectacle des marionettes les survivance et la recreation des mythes peuplant les plus anciennes légendes. Les lutins, les elfes, les gnomes, les génies, fruits d'une poésie violente et inquiète, révèlent combien l'homme a cherché dans les forces de la

nature dont le mécanisme lui échappait, à la fois une explication et un tourment. Comme eux les marionnettes ne vivent que dans un récit limité par une action et un temps donnés." p. 9.

²⁹Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre," Playwrights on Playwriting, ed. Toby Cole, (New York, 1960), p. 88.

³⁰Ibid., p. 89.

³¹Artaud, op. cit., p. 150.

³²Grossvogel, op. cit., p. 21.

³³Béhar, op. cit., p. 37.

³⁴Jarry, Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. 4, pp. 158-159.

³⁵Ubu Roi, Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. 4, p. 56.

³⁶Albert Camus, Caligula in Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles d'Albert Camus, (Paris, 1962), p. 38.

³⁷Charles Chassé, Dans les Coulisses de la Gloire; D'Ubu Roi au Douanier Rousseau, (Paris, 1947), p. 92.

³⁸Ibid., loc. cit.

³⁹Grossvogel, op. cit., p. 27.

⁴⁰Ibid., loc. cit.

⁴¹Ibid., loc. cit.

⁴²Béhar, op. cit., p. 38.

⁴³See the quotes in Chassé's Dans les Couloisses de la Gloire; D'Ubu Roi au Douanier Rousseau, pp. 91-108.

⁴⁴Jarry, Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. 4, p. 159.

⁴⁵Breton, op. cit., p. 217-229.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 11.

⁴⁷Béhar, op. cit., p. 31.

⁴⁸Beigbeder, op. cit., p. 35.

⁴⁹R. Massat, Preface to Jarry's Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. 1, p. 11.

⁵⁰Béhar, op. cit., p. 38.

⁵¹Raymond, op. cit., p. 4.

⁵²Davies, op. cit., p. 94.

⁵³Jarry, Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. 4, p. 25.

⁵⁴Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 217.

⁵⁵Ibid., loc. cit.

⁵⁶Shattuck, op. cit., p. 241.

⁵⁷Jarry, op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 25.

⁵⁸Adéma, op. cit., p. 103.

⁵⁹Apollinaire, "L'Esprit Nouveau et les Poètes," O.C., Vol. 3,
p. 906.

⁶⁰Quoted by René Massat in Jarry's Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. 4,
p. 11.

⁶¹SIC, nos. 19-20 (juillet-août 1917), n.p.

⁶²Ibid., loc. cit.

PART II

THE AESTHETICS OF APOLLINAIRE

CHAPTER IV

THE INFLUENCES OF APOLLINAIRE'S POETRY

AND CRITICAL WORKS ON HIS THEATRE

"L'homme s'est familiarisé avec ces êtres formidables que sont les machines, il a exploré le domaine des infiniment petits, et de nouveaux domaines s'ouvrent à l'activité de son imagination: celui de l'infiniment grand et celui de la prophétie."¹

[Guillaume Apollinaire]

Because Apollinaire was primarily a poet and not a playwright, his poetic theories coloured his theatre to a great extent. Before an analysis of his theatre can be undertaken, some consideration of these theories, as well as his critical ideas must be made.

Since Apollinaire's sentiments and viewpoints are reflected in every facet of his writings, it is dangerous to isolate any single feature without relating it to the whole. He himself cautioned against any attempt to classify either his work or that of any other artist of his era: "l'Esprit Nouveau est avant tout ennemi de l'esthétisme, des formules et de tout snobisme."² Apollinaire had an uncanny ability to write in a variety of genres. Undoubtedly the greatest volume of his writings was in the field of artistic criticism - painting, literature, cinema or anything that currently appealed to him. He published in numerous periodicals, particularly in L'Européen, Mercure de France, La Phalange, Les Soirées de Paris and Le Festin d'Esope.³ In addition, Apollinaire helped found the latter two journals, both of which were designed to encourage young writers. His topics were varied and often surprising: "La Critique des poètes,"⁴ "Musique Nouvelle,"⁵ "Aux Grands hommes la Patrie reconnaissante,"⁶ "Compte rendu de la représentation à Berlin du 'Coq rouge' de Gérard Hauptmann,"⁷ and a whole series of articles printed in Les Marges entitled "La Littérature féminine" written under the pseudonym, Louise Lalanne.⁸

In addition to the diverse and scattered articles, the periodicals published several poems and short stories which were later republished under various titles: Méditations Esthétiques: Les Peintres Cubistes (1913), probably the best known and most widely read of

Apollinaire's artistic criticisms; Alcools (1913), the first text in which he abolished punctuation; L'Enchanteur Pourrissant (1909) and L'Hérésiarque et Cie (1910), both collections of short stories. In addition to his three published plays, Apollinaire wrote three scenarios which were neither produced nor published: A la cloche de bois (1898); La Bréhatine (1916) a motion picture scenario written in collaboration with André Billy; and L'Homme sans yeux, sans nez et sans oreilles (1916), a ballet based on his poem "Le Musicien de Saint-Merry".⁹

Not only was the artist a master of several genres, but a writer of varied styles, from the unpunctuated free verse of Alcools, or the visual onomatopoeia of Calligrammes, to the strict rhythms of Casanova. Apollinaire's prose oscillated between the formalism of Les Peintres Cubistes and the dream-like style of "Onirocritique."

And yet the variability of Apollinaire was rarely more evident than in his theatre. The first of the plays, Les Mamelles de Tirésias, subtitled "drame surréaliste", was an attempt to oppose "les caractères du drame aussi bien à l'idéalisme symboliste qu'au réalisme naturaliste."¹⁰ Couleur du Temps was described by Georges Pioch, reviewing the 1918 performance, as "une oeuvre puissante, rare et haute en symboles."¹¹ And Casanova, by the subtitle provided by Apollinaire, "comédie parodique", and by Mallet's description of it as "un opéra bouffe, [. . .] un opéra comique au sens le plus ancien et le plus vrai de l'expression,"¹² is a play far removed from the symbolism of Couleur du Temps or the surrealism of Les Mamelles de Tirésias.

Given the unusual diversity of Apollinaire's work, it might be argued that his knowledge lacked substantial depth, and that his penchant for mystification reflects a defensive attitude towards himself and his works rather than true profundity. Aegerter makes such an allegation: "avec toutes ses fantaisies techniques, ses farces joyeuses qui sentent l'atelier de peinture, son cynisme charmant, ne fut-il pas un mystificateur?"¹³ Considering Apollinaire's desire to obscure the facts of his birth, this charge is not unfounded. The Louise Lalanne episode (see Note 8) and the mock-serious attitude towards repopulation in Les Mamelles de Tirésias would also tend to support Aegerter's contention. But still the problem remains: was Apollinaire extremely profound, or was this only mystification for its own sake?

The poet himself refuted all charges of mystification: "je n'ai jamais fait des farces et ne me suis livré à aucune mystification touchant mon oeuvre ou celle des autres."¹⁴ However, this statement is misleading and obscure, and in itself is a kind of mystification. Apollinaire was, in reality, defensive of the criticism levied at his diverse but somewhat shallow knowledge: " . . . si je suis lettré, ce que je crois, c'est plutôt par un goût naturel qui me fait bien saisir l'intérêt et la perfection d'un ouvrage, soit d'art, soit de littérature, soit d'autre chose, c'est plutôt par une sorte d'intuition, dis-je que par l'étude."¹⁵

However Apollinaire's mystification did not involve only trickery but a genuine desire to promote "l'Esprit Nouveau". For example, the poet began promoting the paintings of Henri Rousseau in

Je dis tout in 1907. But the canvases of the Douanier were frowned upon and the painter was dismissed as one who "paints with his feet with his eyes closed."¹⁶ Both Rousseau and Apollinaire were ridiculed and Apollinaire was suspected of hoax. Even after Rousseau attained fame, the aura of doubt lingered. The banquet held in his honour in 1908 was described as "an immense joke at Rousseau's expense."¹⁷ But at this time, Apollinaire, along with Picasso, the Fauvists and the Cubists, had become interested in negro and primitive art. Henri Rousseau epitomized the Parisian version of the primitive artist. By highlighting his works, Apollinaire drew attention to this rediscovered art form. Consequently, his efforts created the duality of mystification-demystification; that is, initial mystification of the painter and his simplicity followed by a revelation or demystification of the art form: "la grande idée d'Apollinaire et des admirateurs du peintre, ce fut ainsi le rafraîchissement de l'art par la sincérité, le renouveau par le primitivisme."¹⁸

There was, then, a dual cause for Apollinaire's peculiar mystification. He was, on the one hand, consciously attempting to promote a new theory of art with "l'Esprit Nouveau"; on the other he was trying to shield himself from the scrutiny of the outside world. It is this latter cause which had the greater effect on Apollinaire's work, for the multifariousness of his personality is manifested noticeably in his works.

It is this approach of art through the artist's life that one must choose when dealing with Apollinaire, notwithstanding the cautions of Victor Basch, among others, that "en l'art, l'intention

n'est rien: l'oeuvre seule vaut."¹⁹ The advice of Charles Lalo is perhaps more valid with reference to Apollinaire:

. . . une oeuvre est réputée manquée ou laide dans la mesure où elle n'est pas l'observation, l'expansion ou l'exaltation du moi et de l'expérience vitale de son ouvrier et de son usager.

.
Et l'on peut la [ie. the above tradition] fonder sur une des lois les plus générales de la nature vivante et sensible: c'est que tout état intérieur de la conscience tend à se prolonger et se compléter par un mouvement extérieur.²⁰

For example, in his poetry Apollinaire often referred to what would otherwise be obscure symbols and allusions were they not examined in the context of his life and the circumstances under which he wrote them. It is an accepted fact, for instance, that "La Chanson du Mal-Aimé" was a manifestation of a "personal death and ascension cycle"²¹ resulting from the loss of Annie Playden, an English governess who was one of Apollinaire's first loves. If the reader is aware of this added dimension, he is likely to appreciate more fully the significance of the London setting as well as the stimulus which generated the poem:

Ses [Apollinaire's] déconvenues sentimentales, [. . .] lui sont au fond salutaires et stimulant ses facultés créatrices. Par réaction dérivative il s'acharne aux travaux littéraires sur les sujets les plus divers, déposant un peu partout des textes en prose ou en vers. . . .²²

This aspect of Apollinaire's art is in keeping with the entire period in which he lived. Although he did not fuse his life with his art as completely as did Jarry, the younger poet's life was inseparable from his work. Lalo might be describing Apollinaire in

the following passage:

Que la vie affective tende à s'exprimer au dehors, c'est une loi de la nature sensible; que cette expression tende à être une oeuvre d'art, c'est une loi de la sensibilité artiste; enfin, que cette oeuvre soit un reflet de cette vie, qu'elle se tienne le plus près possible de l'expérience vécue personnellement, ce n'est pas le fait de toute la variété artiste de cette espèce, mais seulement d'un des types de cette variété: celui qui rapproche l'art de la vie pour des fins d'égoïsme.²³

Apollinaire falls into this category of art as an affirmation of the self - "une sorte de 'sur-moi' ou d'idéal du moi."²⁴ This aspect of Apollinaire is most evident in Le Poète Assassiné, a semi-autobiographical novel in which the hero, Croniamantal, is subjected to the sacrificial life of a poet. In the twelfth episode of the novel, entitled "Amour," he is brought before a fresh-water spring, in which he sees the symbol of ever-lasting poetic inspiration:

J'aime les sources, elles sont un beau symbole d'immortalité, quand elles ne tarissent point. Celle-ci n'a jamais tari. Et je cherche une divinité, mais je veux qu'elle me paraisse éternelle. Et ma source n'a jamais tari.²⁵

The connection between the poet as a divinity and eternity is explicit in these lines as it is throughout Apollinaire's work. In this episode of Le Poète Assassiné, Croniamantal leaning over the spring indeed reminds one of Narcissus who falls in love with his own reflection in a stream. The spring carries on a dialogue with Croniamantal, who adopts the spring as his lover:

La Source: Au fond de mon petit lit plein d'un orient de gemmes, je t'entends avec agrément, ô poète! que j'ai enchanté.

. . . je veux donner une fête en l'honneur de mon amant. J'y viendrai seule, comme il convient à une vierge. De mon amant, le poète, la puissance s'est déjà manifestée et ses présents sont doux à mon coeur. Il m'a donné ses yeux tout en larmes, deux sources adorables et tributaires de mon ruisseau.

Croniamantal: O source fécondante, tes eaux semblent ta chevelure. Les fleurs naissent autour de toi et nous nous aimerons toujours.²⁶

Linked to this idea of the narcissistic artist is the theme of the artist as a divine creator and prophet, a leitmotiv basic to Apollinaire's work. The artist, as Apollinaire saw him was no ordinary human being but a kind of Nietzschean Superman, whose function was to be a non-human, even inhuman entity who teaches and creates:

Avant tout, les artistes sont des hommes qui veulent devenir inhumains.
Ils cherchent péniblement les traces de l'inhumanité, traces que l'on ne rencontre nulle part dans la nature.
Elles sont la vérité et en dehors d'elles nous ne connaissons aucune réalité.²⁷

Like Nietzsche, Apollinaire had high aspirations for man and he refuted the notion of a Christ figure. It is this non-belief in Christ that permits Isaac Laquedem, the Wandering Jew of L'Hérésiarque et Cie, to cry out:

Gardez la paix de l'âme et soyez méchant.
Les bons vous en sauront gré. Le Christ!
Je l'ai bafoué. Il m'a fait surhumain.²⁸

Every man was capable of becoming an earthly divinity to the degree to which he was willing to express himself and liberate his natural instincts. Every thing, every object in the world was of equal

value in Apollinaire's mind. The artist, as a divine catalyst, was responsible for transforming those things into truths more essential than the reality itself:

Tous les corps sont égaux devant la lumière et leurs modifications résultent de ce pouvoir lumineux qui construit à son gré.

.
[. . .] le peintre doit avant tout se donner le spectacle de sa propre divinité et les tableaux qu'il offre à l'admiration des hommes leur conféreront la gloire d'exercer aussi et momentanément leur propre divinité.²⁹

Apollinaire's "method" of creation involves a three part formula, recurrent in different terms throughout his works. It is most explicit in Les Peintres Cubistes:

Il faut [. . .] embrasser d'un coup d'oeil: le passé, le présent, et l'avenir.

La toile doit présenter cette unité essentielle qui seule provoque l'extase.³⁰

This "unité essentielle" is primary to the poet who wants to express truths beyond those of photographic reality: " . . . j'ai pensé qu'il fallait revenir à la nature même, mais sans l'imiter à la manière des photographes."³¹ In Les Peintres Cubistes, Apollinaire compares a painting which fulfills this prerequisite to the eternal beauty of a flame:

La flamme est la symbole de la peinture . . .

La flamme a la pureté qui ne souffre rien d'étranger et transforme cruellement en elle-même ce qu'elle atteint.

Elle a cette unité magique qui fait que si on la divise, chaque flammèche est semblable à la flamme unique.

Elle a enfin la vérité sublime de sa lumière que nul ne peut nier.³²

With the help of the artist and his divine powers, the future need no longer be feared as an unknown. The artist will create the future and thus predict it: " . . . en examinant le passé on trouvera des exemples, en créant l'avenir on pensera à léguer des forces à ceux qui sont à naître."³³

In addition to being a clairvoyant, Apollinaire's artist was to fill a social function. The duty of an artist was to rally men of a certain period together in order to create a uniformity of art forms: "c'est le propre de l'art, son rôle social, de créer cette illusion: le type."³⁴ Through a consolidation of art forms, an illusion of solidarity is created for a particular period in history. Art being the most energetic aspect of any society,³⁵ Apollinaire felt it was supremely ironical that those who mock their artists in essence mock themselves. For it is through art that future societies will learn about their ancestors: "ceux qui se moquent des nouveaux peintres, se moquent de leur propre figure, car l'humanité de l'avenir se représentera l'humanité d'aujourd'hui d'après les représentations que les artistes de l'art le plus vivant, c'est-à-dire le plus nouveau, en auront laissées."³⁶ Thus the social function of an artist is to reveal and express through his own artistic style, the essence of his society and by this to provide a reflection of his society for future generations: "les poètes et les artistes déterminent de concert la figure de leur époque et docilement l'avenir se range à leur avis."³⁷ Because the artist is able to predict the future in this way, he has become a human divinity:

Chaque divinité crée à son image; ainsi des peintres. Et les photographes seuls fabriquent la reproduction de la nature.³⁸

Elsewhere in his works, and as Scott Bates suggests, mainly in his critical writings,³⁹ the "unité essentielle" of past-present-future is translated into three realities: "the external reality of nature, science, and the picturesque; the inherited reality of imagination, instinct, and intuition; and the final reality of art."⁴⁰ The combination of the first two produces art (Apollinaire called it "extase" in Les Peintres Cubistes, p. 16). Apollinaire often emphasized that none of the three categories could exist alone and that they needed the divine artist to fuse them together into "les vertus plastiques: la pureté, l'unité et la vérité."⁴¹ In spite of his faith in the material realities of science and nature, Apollinaire realized that neither were art forms on their own. He would probably have approved of Bayer's definition of the "Expérience du Beau":

L'expérience ouverte est tout ce qu'il y a d'inachevé dans l'image ou le spectacle, la généralité de son évolution, ou mieux sa lacune. Tout ce qui pourrait spécifier, rendre l'objet à sa particularité et à ses déterminations singulières, à son hic et nunc et à sa vie banale, semble en ce premier état aller contre le beau.⁴²

The first impression of an object or a scene is then this "expérience du beau" and any attempt to alter the original goes against the initial sensual experience.

The second element of Bate's formula, "the inherited inner reality of imagination, instinct, and intuition," must indeed be translated by an artist with inherited abilities, for

. . . qui n'est pas doué à dix ans ne
sera jamais doué.

.
. . . [l'] inspiration [. . .] est [. . .]
le plus souvent un équipement héréditaire.⁴³

The final stage of the Apollinairian trinity, the art work itself, can only be reached through the efforts of an artist. Bayer seems to agree with Apollinaire's insistence on the superhuman qualities of the artist:

Un artiste est un chef; il est de ceux qui
sont psychologiquement riches et, par consé-
quent, il sera toujours meneur et non mené,
toujours initiateur, jamais imitateur. Dans
les plus hautes conditions humaines, c'est
l'initiative et l'originalité qui l'empor-
tent, car la règle est faite pour ceux qui
obéissent et les puissants n'obéissent pas,
ils commandent.⁴⁴

In Couleur du Temps the original trinity of past, present and future is personified in the three main characters: Van Diemen, An-saldin and Nyctor respectively. At the beginning of the play, Nyctor contemplates their situation:

Trois hommes pour un monde nouveau
L'un riche ce qui nous a permis
De tout préparer pour ce voyage
.
Il est tout le passé ce richard
Le passé c'est-à-dire la mort
L'autre un savant dont les connaissances
Nous feront vivre il est le présent
C'est-à-dire la vie et la lutte
Quelque chose enfin de bien bourgeois
Et le corps oui la réalité
L'autre enfin voyageant les mains vides
Pleurera à jamais pleurera
Comme si tout était trépassé
Comme si le présent était mort
Car il est l'avenir ce poète
C'est-à-dire la crainte joyeuse
Moins que la mort et plus que la vie

L'avenir enfin ou le désir
La Beauté même ou la vérité.⁴⁵

Truly a didactic work, the play actually terminates in a minor key, none of the three heroes having attained his "ideal". This overt pessimism is unusual for Apollinaire.⁴⁶

The insistence on the poet as creator played an important part in "l'Esprit Nouveau", Apollinaire's own theory of the modern mind. Although he made numerous references to it throughout his later critical writings, the essay entitled "L'Esprit Nouveau et les Poètes," did not appear in Mercure de France until after his death. In the article, the author delineates essentially six points around which the whole theory of "l'Esprit Nouveau" revolved. Throughout the relatively short paper Apollinaire insisted upon the idea of poet as prophet, as he did in Les Peintres Cubistes. He explained the reason for this: "c'est que poésie et création ne sont qu'une même chose; on ne doit pas appeler poète que celui qui invente, celui qui crée, dans la mesure où l'homme peut créer."⁴⁷ In the sense that a poet's purpose is to create fables which will come true, he is divine. Apollinaire congratulated "ceux qui ont imaginé la fable d'Icare"⁴⁸ whose chariot flew through the sky, because the myth came true through the scientific minds of the twentieth century. The same kind of genius which created Icarus will continue to invent new fables for later generations to realize. The poet is the elixir of life:

Les poètes enfin seront chargés de donner
par les téléologies lyriques et les alchimies
archilyriques un sens toujours plus pur à

l'idée divine, qui est en nous si vivante
et si vraie, qui est ce perpétuel renouvel-
lement de nous-mêmes, cette création éter-
nelle, cette poésie sans cesse renaissante
dont nous vivons.⁴⁹

The second point Apollinaire emphasizes is that poets must adjust to the fast pace of the natural sciences. Although man had become accustomed to new machinery ("ces êtres formidables que sont les machines"⁵⁰) new inventions, and the industrial age in general, the rapidity with which the new spirit in the sciences arose left the arts far behind. The function of the poet was to fill "cette lacune et leurs poèmes synthétiques créent de nouvelles entités qui ont une valeur plastique aussi composée que des termes collectifs."⁵¹

The lack of inventiveness and ingenuity in the creation of new forms was the reason for the lag in the arts. The absurdity of reducing "la poésie à une sorte d'harmonie imitative"⁵² had a deterrent effect on the progress in the arts. Nor was an onomatopoeic imitation of scientific inventions sufficient to elevate a poem to the level of divine creation:

Quand un poète moderne note à plusieurs
voix le vrombissement d'un avion, il faut
y voir avant tout le désir du poète d'ha-
bituer son esprit à la réalité. Sa
passion de la vérité le pousse à prendre
des notes presque scientifiques qui, s'il
veut les présenter comme poèmes, ont le
tort d'être pour ainsi dire des trompe-
oreilles auxquels la réalité sera tou-
jours supérieure.⁵³

What was needed to remedy the situation, the fourth point in the essay, was an entirely new lyrical formula, not necessarily identical for every poet. Apollinaire underlined the inherent danger in

searching for these new formulae: "l'esprit nouveau est plein de dangers, plein d'embuches."⁵⁴ For, in keeping with any new attempts or pursuits, certain pitfalls must be anticipated and overcome. The importance of "l'esprit nouveau" lay in the interest in new experiences and quests for new forms of self-expression. With this new-found liberty in choosing one's own mode of poetry, Apollinaire predicted that future poets would become "chefs d'un orchestre"⁵⁵ who would have at their disposal "le monde entier, ses rumeurs et ses apparences, la pensée et le langage humain, le chant, la danse, tous les arts et tous les artifices, plus de mirages encore que ceux que pouvait faire surgir Morgane sur le mont Gibel pour composer le livre vu et entendu de l'avenir."⁵⁶ Although the beginnings of "l'esprit nouveau" might be dubious, the groundwork would be laid, and future results would be limitless:

Ce sont des matériaux qu'amasse le poète,
qu'amasse l'esprit nouveau, et ces ma-
tériels formeront un fond de vérité dont
la simplicité, la modestie ne doit point
rebuter, car les conséquences, les ré-
sultats peuvent être de grandes, de bien
grandes choses.⁵⁷

Apollinaire poses the fifth issue discussed in the article as a rhetorical question:

"Mais n'y a-t-il rien de nouveau sous le
soleil? Il faut voir."⁵⁸

He does allow that there may be nothing totally new under the sun, but emphasizes that combinations of existing things are infinite:

Il y a mille et mille combinaisons na-
turelles qui n'ont jamais été composées.
[. . .] Ce sont ces nouvelles combi-
naisons, ces nouvelles oeuvres de l'art

de vie, que l'on appelle le progrès.⁵⁹

The poet is the catalyst who will find and elaborate these new combinations. His "bon sens"⁶⁰ is his guide to lead him "en des coins sinon nouveaux, du moins inconnus."⁶¹ Even if he cannot discover anything new under the sun, at least he can penetrate more deeply that which is not new.

The success of the combinations the poet devises is measured to the degree to which they surprise the reader. This is the final and most important point (the one most evident in his theatre) that Apollinaire makes. He considers surprise as "le grand ressort nouveau,"⁶² and feels it is " . . . par la surprise, par la place importante qu'il fait à la surprise que l'esprit nouveau se distingue de tous les mouvements artistiques et littéraires qui l'ont précédé."⁶³ The method by which surprise can be evoked is apparently very simple. Because these are "essential truths" for which the poet is searching, and because these truths are eternal yet obscure, "il suffit de les dévoiler pour causer une surprise."⁶⁴ Or failing this, the poet can present "une vérité supposée"⁶⁵ the opposite of an expected truth, and in this way also evoke surprise. For example, the Icarus fable was such a "vérité supposée": "tant que les avions ne peuplaient pas le ciel, la fable d'Icare n'était qu'une vérité supposée."⁶⁶ In the theatre, Apollinaire saw an opportunity to push to its extremes his idea of surprise. For in the theatre the effect is instantaneous and cannot be withdrawn. The surprise can result in shock, revelation, even humour provided that it is new and sudden. Henri Béhar felt this was the reason for Apollinaire's mock serious

treatment of repopulation in Les Mamelles de Tirésias: " . . . il est évident que le succès de la représentation aurait été compromis si Apollinaire s'était, ne fût-ce qu'un instant, permis de sourire: le secret révélé, il n'y aurait plus eu de surprise."⁶⁷ Apollinaire, tongue in cheek, made reference to his own method in a kind of self-ridicule of Les Mamelles de Tirésias:

C'est ainsi que j'imagine que, les femmes ne faisant point d'enfants, les hommes pourraient en faire et que je le montre, j'exprime une vérité littéraire qui ne pourra être qualifiée de fable que hors de la littérature, et je détermine la surprise.⁶⁸

In addition to this all-encompassing method of causing surprise, Apollinaire also produced it on a linguistic level. One of the more prevalent ways was the invention of new words. For example, the "pihis" birds of "Zone", supposedly from China, were described by Apollinaire as:

. . . longs et souples
Qui n'ont qu'une seule aile et qui volent par couples.⁶⁹

The references to this particular invention of Apollinaire are interspersed among several others to exotic or legendary birds: "le colibri," "le phénix," "la colombe."⁷⁰ The surprise caused by these arrests the reader, forcing him to re-examine their context.

The continual references to science and modern inventions were another way by which the poet evoked surprise. The rapid progress in the sciences unmatched by the humanities had always disturbed him. In an interview with Pierre Albert-Birot, published in 1916, Apollinaire expressed what the function of the modern poet should

This method of juxtaposing dissimilar elements to create the chimerical atmosphere of the dream was to become prevalent among later Dadaists and Surrealists. They felt that dreams, assembling as they did such wide-ranging elements, created a new, more "truthful" reality than did the established chronological relationships of waking consciousness. The combination of the conscious and unconscious realities would in no way resemble either of the two components:

Entre les faits de la vie intérieure et ceux de la vie extérieure, des rencontres ont lieu; une harmonie se trahit entre le dedans et le dehors, des signes répondent aux signes; une unité cachée, où s'anéantiraient tous les objets et tous les êtres, se laisse peu à peu appréhender au-delà des phénomènes qui sollicitent les sens et qui composent les songes. Suspendu entre les deux mondes, le poète, dans une demi-extase, s'avancera au coeur de la réalité.⁷⁴

Apollinaire's "Onirocritique" was an early example of such a phenomenon.⁷⁵

The surprise encountered in Apollinaire's dream world form one of the basic techniques of the poet's cubist verse. When he first abolished punctuation with the poems of Alcools in 1913, Apollinaire began a tradition of poetry that was to establish the cubist movement in literature and lead to the foundation of later surrealist theories. It was not only the elimination of punctuation that inaugurated the new movement (in fact, many Cubists and Surrealists did not follow suit), but Apollinaire's reasons for suppressing it. Punctuation forced the author's interpretation of a poem upon the reader, a pitfall that Apollinaire wished to avoid. The subjectivity of the reader was most important, the rhythm and arrangement

of the lines being the only punctuation:

Pour ce qui concerne la ponctuation je ne
l'ai supprimé que parce qu'elle m'a paru
inutile et elle l'est en effet, le rythme
et la couple des vers voilà la véritable
ponctuation et il n'en est point besoin
d'une autre.⁷⁶

By 1917 Apollinaire was more adamant in his convictions: "la ponctuation permet aux mauvais écrivains de justifier leur style."⁷⁷

Apollinaire went yet a step further. The initial effect that the lack of punctuation had on a reader was one of surprise followed by a sense of immediacy and closeness; that is, the non-punctuated lines coupled with the verbs in the present tense produced the ambiance of proximity which the poet sought. The present tense was, and is, a device more usual in poetry than in the novel because the necessities of a chronological linear narration are eliminated. The conscience and consciousness of a reader of poetry are thus directed to the needs of the present. For Apollinaire, with his awareness of the progressive world around him, the need to situate the reader in the present was inherent:

. . . la véritable pureté prosaïque doit être
trouvée, non pas en deça du temps prosaïque,
mais au delà. Il ne s'agit pas tant d'ignorer
la chronologie que de la surmonter.⁷⁸

Simultaneism was another way by which Apollinaire broke down preconceived notions of time and space. Shattuck provides a concise definition of this technique: "the aspiration of simultaneism is to grasp the moment in its total significance, or, more ambitiously to manufacture a moment which surpasses our usual perception of time and space."⁷⁹ Through use of the present tense, abolition of punctuation

and cutting the lines at unexpected places, Apollinaire was able to "manufacture" this moment in which time and space take on totally arbitrary relationships. In Calligrammes, for example, it is often very difficult to trace the original pattern of writing and the interpretations are thus widely diversified.

In his theatre simultaneism was evoked both visually, as with the duelling scenes between Presto and Lacouf in Les Mamelles de Tirésias, and through various speeches. In the following discourse of Thérèse, she declares her wish to have many professions simultaneously:

. . . après avoir été soldat je veux être artiste

 Je veux être aussi député avocat sénateur
 Ministre président de la chose publique
 Et je veux médecin physique ou bien psychique
 Diafoirer à mon gré l'Europe et l'Amérique
 Faire des enfants faire la cuisine non c'est trop
 Je veux être mathématicienne philosophe chimiste
 Groom dans les restaurants petit télégraphiste⁸⁰

When Apollinaire first introduced simultaneity to the theatre, he was grossly misinterpreted. Victor Basch in particular questioned the theory behind the technique as well as all of cubist literature:

. . . la technique particulière de la pièce
 [ie. Les Mamelles], le simultanéisme, me
 paraît infiniment contestable. La loi des
 arts de la parole est la succession, celle
 des arts plastiques la simultanéité.⁸¹

Basch did not realize that Apollinaire was attempting to break down this conception of language as a linear process. It is a pity that Basch could not have read Henri Béhar's definition of a surrealist theatre:

. . . l'apport majeur du surréalisme: libération du langage, élément pur et privilégié du théâtre. C'est seulement en dégageant les mots de leur carcan étymologique, en les laissant jouer les uns avec les autres que l'on parvient à une production d'images sans précédent, susceptibles de traduire véritablement l'architecture monstrueuse du rêve. Les mots reviennent à l'état sauvage.⁸²

A chapter on Apollinaire aesthetics remains incomplete without some mention of his attitudes towards women, both in his life and in his works. As a result of his illegitimate birth, he was brought up solely under the care of his mother, Mme de Kostrowitsky. She was a beautiful, headstrong woman whose inclination for gambling took her to a variety of European centres. Guillaume and his brother Albert went everywhere with their mother neither giving any indication of condemning her activities but instead gleaning an unusual education from their cosmopolitan surroundings. Apollinaire admired his mother immensely inheriting from her "la sensualité ardente, l'appétit, le goût de la table."⁸³ The desire to please her carried well into his later years, so noticeably in fact that Scott Bates interpreted the poet's almost frenetic desires to enter the French army as "an inner need to become at last the hero of his mother."⁸⁴

This eagerness to please was evident in all his relationships with women. Yet he was thwarted each time having asked in vain for the hand of at least five of his mistresses. The resulting depressions became creative chasms in which Apollinaire wrote many of his best works, for example "La Chanson du Mal-Aimé", already mentioned, and "Zone" which was written after Marie Laurencin had left him.

Apollinaire often professed that the ideal woman would be totally liberated, in the manner of the Marquis de Sade's philosophy. She would have no other duties but to follow up all her desires and to reproduce. He admired Sade's Juliette: "Juliette [. . .] représente la femme nouvelle qu'il [ie. Sade] entrevoyait, un être dont on n'a pas encore idée, qui se dégage de l'humanité qui aura des ailes et qui renouvellera l'univers."⁸⁵ Yet although Apollinaire professed the "free", sexually liberated woman, "he soon found the defect in the absolutely free woman when she left him."⁸⁶ As a result, bitterness and satire tended to pervade his works. In "Le Départ de l'Ombre", a short story in Le Poète Assassiné in which the absence of one's shadow predicts death within thirty days, Croniamantal inexplicably feels a strange pleasure when his companion's shadow leaves her: ". . . lorsque, au bout d'un moment, je voulus revoir nos ombres, je vis avec un plaisir singulièrement atroce que celle de Louise l'avait quittée."⁸⁷ In Thérèse is the symbol of the feminist movement and yet in the end she returns obediently to her role as wife and mother. In Couleur du Temps, the image of the free woman touches on supreme irony. The ideal of the three main characters in the play is peace, but peace is to be found only in the death image of a beautiful woman frozen in ice. This birth-death cycle of love is recurrent in Apollinaire.

In his poetry and critical works he tried to find a replacement for what he felt to be a long-standing pessimism and defeatism in the arts. The result was the theory of "l'Esprit Nouveau" which Apollinaire hoped would encompass all art forms. For the principal

idea behind "l'Esprit Nouveau" was one of freedom, a liberty to invent new forms by combining existing ones and creating new ones. This desire to synthesize the arts into a poetic whole was manifested in his theories on the theatre and in the plays themselves.

NOTES

¹Apollinaire, "L'Esprit Nouveau et les Poètes," O.C., Vol. 3, p. 902.

²Ibid., p. 909.

³Marcel Adéma's bibliography cites eighty journals in which Apollinaire published articles, a few of which appeared posthumously.

⁴Paris-Journal, 5 mai 1914.

⁵Paris-Journal, 24 mai 1914.

⁶Nord-Sud, juin 1917.

⁷La Grande France, janvier 1902.

⁸Apollinaire's perpetration of this hoax lasted for almost a year, an episode which was characteristic of his life-long desire to mystify and confuse his associates. Louise Faure-Favier recounts the success of this particular ruse which kept Apollinaire's friends wary for several years. At a gathering at M. Rachilde's, Apollinaire

se tenait prudemment à l'écart des dames.
C'est que toutes se souvenaient de ses
terribles chroniques dans Les Marges où,
sous le pseudonyme de Louise Lalanne, il
les avait si bien mystifiées, après les

avoir si bien fustigées. [Souvenirs sur Apollinaire, Paris: Editions Bernard Grasset, 1945, p. 98.]

That Apollinaire enjoyed this trickery was obvious:

Guillaume Apollinaire jouait d'autant mieux son rôle que dans ces mêmes numéros des Marges où Louise Lalanne écrivait ses chroniques d'une sensibilité si féminine, il écrivait, sous son nom de Guillaume Apollinaire, des chroniques très viriles.

[Ibid., p. 10.]

⁹Grossvogel, op. cit., p. 337.

¹⁰Michel Lioure, Le Drame, (Paris, 1963), p. 184.

¹¹Quoted by Edouard and Louise Antant-Lara in the preface to Couleur du Temps, (Paris, 1949), p. 17.

¹²Ibid., p. 9.

¹³Aegerter and Labracherie, op. cit., p. 163.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 166.

¹⁵Ibid., loc. cit.

¹⁶Quoted by Shattuck, The Banquet Years, p. 52.

¹⁷Shattuck, op. cit., p. 70.

¹⁸Aegerter and Labracherie, op. cit., p. 70.

¹⁹Victor Basch, Etudes d'Esthétique Dramatique, (Paris, 1929), p. 18.

²⁰Charles Lalo, L'Art Près de la Vie, (Paris, 1946), p. 15.

²¹Scott Bates, Guillaume Apollinaire, (New York, 1967), p. 44.

²²Adéma, Guillaume Apollinaire le mal-aimé, (Paris, 1952), p. 62.

²³Lalo, op. cit., p. 16.

²⁴R. Bayer, Traité d'Esthétique, (Paris, 1956), p. 168.

²⁵O.C., Vol. 1, p. 269. The pun on "tarir" is typical of Apollinaire. Here the word can refer either to the spring drying up or to the expression "ne pas tarir sur un sujet," meaning to be constantly expatiating on a subject. Apollinaire may have been mocking himself for it was a well-known fact that he loved to talk and did so on frequent occasions.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 270-271.

²⁷Apollinaire, Les Peintres Cubistes, O.C., Vol. 4, p. 17.

Although Nietzsche does not define his Superman in explicit terms, the whole theory is based on the premise that "God is dead." [Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra in The Philosophy of Nietzsche (New York, 1954), p. 6]. The greatest man has yet to appear in the world; he is a "future ideal

of a coming humanity." [Mrs. Forster-Nietzsche, Introduction to The Philosophy of Nietzsche, p. xx.] Hence, the notion of the Christ figure to Nietzsche was invalid since there has as yet been no ideal man. He refuted the notion of Christ:

Never yet hath there been a Superman.
Naked have I seen both of them, the greatest
and the smallest man:-

All-too-similar are they still to each
other. Verily even the greatest found I -
all-too-human. [ibid., loc. cit.]

Zarathustra was thus created, an Antichrist figure who avows:

Lo, I teach you the Superman.
The Superman is the meaning of the earth. [. . .]
I conjure you my brethren, remain true to the
earth, and believe not those who speak unto you
of superearthly hopes. [Nietzsche, ibid.,
pp. 6-7].

²⁸O.C., Vol. 1, p. 113.

²⁹Les Peintres Cubistes, O.C., Vol. 4, p. 16.

³⁰Ibid., loc. cit.

³¹Apollinaire, Preface to Les Mamelles de Tirésias, O.C.,
Vol. 3, p. 609.

³²O.C., Vol. 4, pp. 15-16.

³³Apollinaire, "Les Tendances Nouvelles," interview with Pierre
Albert-Birot, O.C., Vol. 3, p. 937.

³⁴Les Peintres Cubistes, O.C., Vol. 4, p. 22.

³⁵" . . . les oeuvres d'art étant ce qu'une époque produit de plus énergique au point de vue de la plastique. Cette énergie s'impose aux hommes et elle est pour eux la mesure plastique d'une époque." [Les Peintres Cubistes, O.C., Vol. 4, p. 22.]

³⁶Les Peintres Cubistes, O.C., Vol. 4, p. 22.

³⁷Ibid., p. 21.

³⁸Ibid., p. 17.

³⁹Bates, op. cit., pp. 77-78.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 78.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 15.

⁴²Bayer, op. cit., p. 12.

⁴³Ibid., p. 17.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 186.

⁴⁵O.C., Vol. 3, pp. 656-657.

⁴⁶The initial impression of much of Apollinaire's work is, however, one of profound pessimism. However the poet may have been

unconscious of the melancholic tone of his work, for throughout his critical works he emphasized the need to " . . . réagir contre le pessimisme qui depuis le début du XIX^e siècle n'a pas cessé de hanter nos écrivains." ("M. Guillaume Apollinaire et la Nouvelle Ecole Littéraire", interview with Gaston Picard, O.C., Vol. 3, p. 939.)

⁴⁷"L'Esprit Nouveau. . . ", O.C., Vol. 3, p. 907. Victor Hugo, in his Préface de Cromwell, had advocated a similar idea: "l'art [. . .] donne cette vie de vérité et de saillie qui enfante l'illusion, ce prestige de réalité qui passionne le spectateur, et le poète le premier, car le poète est de bonne foi. Ainsi le but de l'art est presque divin: réessusciter, s'il fait de l'histoire, créer, s'il fait de la poésie." (Préface de Cromwell, p. 45.) There are in fact many parallels between Hugo's essay and Apollinaire's "L'Esprit Nouveau et les Poètes" and the Preface and Prologue to Les Mamelles de Tirésias. Some of these are discussed in Chapter 5.

⁴⁸"L'Esprit Nouveau et les Poètes," O.C., Vol. 3, p. 908.

⁴⁹Ibid., loc.cit.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 902.

⁵¹Ibid., loc. cit.

⁵²Ibid., p. 903.

⁵³Ibid., p. 904.

⁵⁴Ibid., loc. cit.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 901.

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 901-902.

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 904-905.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 905.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 906.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 905.

⁶¹Ibid., loc. cit.

⁶²Ibid., p. 906.

⁶³Ibid., loc. cit.

⁶⁴Ibid., loc. cit., Jean Cocteau in the preface to Les Mariés de

la Tour Eiffel had similar sentiments:

Le poète doit sortir objets et sentiments de leurs voiles et de leurs brumes, les montrer soudain, si nus et si vite, que l'homme a peine à les reconnaître. Ils le frappent alors avec leur jeunesse, comme s'ils n'étaient jamais devenus des vieillards officiels. (J. C., Théâtre, Paris: Gallimard, 1948, Vol. 1, p. 43).

⁶⁵Ibid., loc. cit.

⁶⁶Ibid., loc. cit.

⁶⁷Béhar, op. cit., p. 46.

⁶⁸"L'Esprit Nouveau et les Poètes," O.C., Vol. 3, p. 906.

⁶⁹"Zone," Alcools, O.C., Vol. 3, p. 57.

⁷⁰Ibid., loc. cit.

⁷¹"Les Tendances Nouvelles," O.C., Vol. 3, p. 937.

⁷²"Zone," Alcools, O.C., Vol. 3, p. 55.

⁷³Ibid., p. 56.

⁷⁴Raymond, De Baudelaire au Surréalisme, pp. 223-224.

⁷⁵Il y a, (Paris, 1949).

⁷⁶Apollinaire, letter to Henri Martineau, 1913, O.C., Vol. 4,
p. 768.

⁷⁷Interview with Gaston Picard, June 24, 1917, O.C., Vol. 3,
p. 939.

⁷⁸Quoted by Robert Champigny, "Le Temps chez Apollinaire,"

PMLA, LXVII, (March 1952), p. 4.

⁷⁹Shattuck, op. cit., p. 266.

⁸⁰O.C., Vol. 3, pp. 622-623.

⁸¹Basch, op. cit., p. 176.

⁸²Béhar, op. cit., p. 24.

⁸³Adéma, op. cit., p. 10.

⁸⁴Bates, op. cit., p. 134.

⁸⁵"Le Divin Marquis," in Les Diables Amoureux, O.C., Vol. 2,
p. 231.

⁸⁶Bates, op. cit., p. 135.

⁸⁷O.C., Vol. 1, p. 326.

CHAPTER V

APOLLINAIRE'S THEORIES ON THE THEATRE

"Tout ce que nous connaissons,
c'est une révolution d'en-
semble, organique, où nous
constatons que ce qui se pro-
duit dans un domaine se passe
dans un autre."¹

[Marc Beigbeder]

In some respects Apollinaire's three plays are nothing more than an extension of his poetry. He theorized rarely on the theatre and in the few documents that he did write, the dramatic theories often yield to exhortations of "l'Esprit Nouveau" which was essentially Apollinaire's theory of the new poetry. However, because Apollinaire often emphasized the need to amalgamate the arts into a powerful whole, "un art plus complet,"² the theory behind "l'Esprit Nouveau" can and should be applied to all forms of art. When Apollinaire exalted Picasso, Cocteau, Massine and Satie for having achieved in Parade "pour la première fois cette alliance de la peinture et de la danse, de la plastique et de la mimique"³ he was concerned with their refusal to be moulded into any artistic category, an accomplishment which the poet thought essential to the new spirit:

De cette alliance nouvelle, car jusqu'ici les décors et les costumes, d'une part, la chorégraphie, d'autre part, n'avaient entre eux qu'un lien factice, il est résulté, dans Parade, une sorte de surréalisme où je vois le point de départ d'une série de manifestations de cet Esprit Nouveau, qui, trouvant aujourd'hui l'occasion de se montrer, ne manquera pas de séduire l'élite et se promet de modifier de fond en comble les arts et les mœurs dans l'allégresse universelle, car le bon sens veut qu'ils soient au moins à la hauteur des progrès scientifiques et industriels.⁴

This desire to consolidate all forms of art pervades Apollinaire's articles on the theatre. He was essentially a "scientific poet" in that he experimented with a wide variety of art forms in the hope of producing a chemical reaction, which would result in a completely new artistic spirit. In this sense Apollinaire's theatre is

didactic because of his efforts to lead his audience through new experiences and sensations. He wanted to break almost completely with any preconceived notion of what a theatre should be. To accomplish this he proposed, among other things, a theatre in the round:

Un théâtre rond à deux scènes
 Une au centre l'autre formant comme un anneau
 Autour des spectateurs. . .⁵

This idea of a theatre in the round was not entirely new. At least one other theorist, Pierre Albert-Birot⁶ had proposed a similar stage for his "théâtre unique" one year before Apollinaire: "tant qu'au théâtre (immeuble) ce ne peut être qu'un cirque dont le public occupera le centre tandis que sur une plateforme périphérique tournante se déroulera la majorité du spectacle relié encore au public par des acteurs parsemés dans son enceinte."⁷

Both Apollinaire and Birot felt this peripheral stage would solve the fourth wall problem of the proscenium stage, by involving the audience physically if not spiritually in the action.⁸ The spectator thus drawn into the inner circle of action, Apollinaire became in effect, the "maître des fêtes"⁹, a power position for which he had always longed. He became the poet-creator, able to predict the future - this time that of the audience.

There was, of course, an element of mystification in Apollinaire's manoeuvre. However, Henri Béhar saw in the poet's desire to mystify a need to teach: "il y a un réel souci d'enseignement chez celui qui la [mystification] pratique."¹⁰ In order to put himself successfully in this power position, Apollinaire had to obtain the participation of his public. He would have agreed with Albert-Birot

who said of the "théâtre nunique": " . . . le théâtre nunique doit être un grand tout simultané, contenant tous les moyens et toutes les émotions capables de communiquer une vie intense et énivrante aux spectateurs."¹¹ The playwright now becomes " . . . le prêtre qui en-voûte et dirige une communauté agissante, non passive."¹² In Les Mamelles de Tirésias, Apollinaire developed several ways to include the audience in the action such as the balloons which represent Thérèse's breasts floating out into the audience, or Presto and La-couf entering from the back of the house.

One can see the close parallels to be drawn between the methods of Birot and Apollinaire, and the later Dadaists, whose interest lay mainly in provoking a reaction from the spectators, often a hostile one (a desirable trait according to the Dadaists). However, in their fervent quest for audience response, the Dadaists were swallowed up in their own theories, attempting to substitute " . . . à [leur] unité logique, forcément acquise, [leur] unité absurde"¹³ Their self-willed, self-inflicted violence was their destruction, which, ironically, in their own terms, might have been the desired effect.

Apollinaire, however, never lost sight of his original aim - to remain in control of the situation. Only in this capacity of "maître des fêtes" could he hope to impose his theories on the audience. The foremost thought in Apollinaire's mind was to revolutionize art, as he advocated in "L'Esprit Nouveau et les Poètes." To succeed in this, he felt he must manipulate the audience into trusting and believing him, and when he had control, take the audi-

ence unaware and surprise them - an element essential to the new spirit. This explains Apollinaire's grave approach towards repopulation in Les Mamelles de Tirésias. "Il [le drame] a [. . .] pour but," he says in the preface, "de mettre en relief une question vitale pour ceux qui entendent la langue dans laquelle il est écrit: le problème de la repopulation."¹⁴ The spectators having no reason to doubt this, believe the author and prepare themselves for a "pièce à thèse" advocating the repopulation of France. Apollinaire then proceeds to lead them through what he himself called a "farce"¹⁵ although he alone, as leader of the game, realized that the farce concerned repopulation and not women's liberation, as the audience suspected. The feminist movement was in vogue around 1903-1905 and by 1917 had lost its initial shock impact; the audience was thus able to laugh at Apollinaire's mockery of the subject. They did not see, however, that this was merely the playwright's pretext to draw them into his own, much greater farce. It is not until the second last scene of the play that the spectator realizes he has been duped and is in actual fact the subject of mockery. "Le mari" has reproduced 40,050 children in a single day. The reason, he says, "je m'enrichis."¹⁶ When the "gendarme" proposes the problem of feeding them, the husband replies: "donnez-lui [la population zanzibarienne] des cartes ça remplace tout."¹⁷ The coldbloodedness with which Apollinaire proposes this solution is what produces the surprise and shock in the audience - an "application systématique de la surprise."¹⁷

On one level, Apollinaire levied an enormous social satire

against the bourgeoisie (although in much less denunciatory terms than did Jarry twenty years earlier). Because "le mari" produced children only for the purposes of his own welfare, Apollinaire was in fact ridiculing not supporting the subject of repopulation. Why he did this (when elsewhere he championed families of great fecundity) is a matter for speculation. It has already been mentioned in Chapter Four that Apollinaire was often embittered when his mistresses actually took his advice and became liberated, leaving him. Apollinaire may have been retaliating when he satirized repopulation in Les Mamelles. Or, even more esoterically, it may have been because of his own masochistic nature, that he ridiculed something so close to him.

Apart from the social satire, there was a more general yet personal reason for wanting to manipulate the audience. Apollinaire's desire to be master of his own ceremonies, so to speak, in all his endeavours may have stemmed from his initial, ever present desire to be noticed and accepted. He was always trying to win approval - from his mother, his mistresses, his friends. More often than not he was thwarted and turned to his art for consolation. He became involved in many aspects of art, and in each one he wanted to be leader: "il est temps d'être les maîtres."¹⁹ By boosting the image and role of the poet, "[il] par la nature même de ces explorations, est isolé dans le monde nouveau où il entre le premier, et la seule consolation qui lui reste c'est que les hommes, finalement, ne vivant que des mensonges dont ils les matelassent, il se trouve que le poète seul nourrit la vie où l'humanité trouve cette vérité."²⁰ Apollinaire was thus able to boost his own image - in his own eyes and in the eyes

of others. He was a self-proclaimed martyr.

With this essential "martyr-maître" quality of Apollinaire in mind, an examination of his articles written specifically on the theatre is now essential. Chronologically, there is no evolution of dramatic thought in these works. For example, his first major work on the subject was Le Théâtre Italien in 1910, yet he did not compose Casanova, modelled after the Italian comedy, until 1918. He claims the idea for Les Mamelles de Tirésias, described as a "drame surréaliste," was envisioned in 1903 but the Prologue, and the Preface, which contain his major thoughts on the theatre, were not added until 1917. This haphazardness is, however, in keeping with the character of Apollinaire and, as his plays will be considered in chronological order, it is logical to treat his articles in the same way.

Le Théâtre Italien was originally written as part of Charles Simond's Encyclopédie Littéraire Illustrée described in the frontispice of the 1910 Louis-Michaud edition as "Anthologie des Chefs-d'oeuvre classiques de toutes les époques et de tous les pays." The work is fairly short containing a thirty-seven page "Tableau du Théâtre Italien" which documents the development of the Italian theatre from its origins in the thirteenth century until Apollinaire's time. This is followed by a selection of texts with brief biographies of their authors.

In his preface to the work, Ugo Capponi emphasizes that Apollinaire was the first to attempt a complete history of the Italian theatre, including the Italians themselves. A few authors, like Salvioli, Sanctis or Luigi de Marandi had provided only incomplete

attempts, exceeding nothing more than bibliographies. As for the quality of Apollinaire's volume, Capponi says:

L'esprit en est judicieux, sans aucune tendance doctrinaire, l'ordonnance claire sans encombrement, le style attachant sans écriture néologique. La division par périodes est bien établie; les oeuvres, dont aucune n'est oubliée de parti pris, sont appréciées avec exactitude; les biographies précises quoique succinctes; les extraits choisis avec discernement; la bibliographie, si précieuse pour quiconque veut approfondir, est puisée aux meilleures sources, et l'iconographie très abondante donne une saveur particulière à l'ensemble.²¹

In the first part of the volume Apollinaire emphasizes that the Italian theatre was the only one in history to grow from two traditions: the oral comedies of the travelling troupes which later became the commedia dell'arte and the written plays, usually tragedies which he called "le théâtre savant."²² It was the former which had the greater influence on the rest of European theatre, and according to Apollinaire especially on Molière whose comedies reflected "la facilité et la bouffonnerie de leurs [les comédiens italiens] répliques."²³ The quality and originality of the comedies far surpassed that of the written works and because " . . . il ne s'agissait pas de pièces écrites,"²⁴ the tradition was lost through the years and " . . . il ne reste pour ainsi dire rien de ce théâtre oral."²⁵

Apollinaire rarely lets his opinions or judgments enter into this well-documented work. Only once does he seem particularly impressed by a specific period where one can draw parallels between that and his own dramatic works. In the fifteenth century the order of Franciscains de l'Ombrie began to present what became known as the

"sacre rappresentazioni". The subjects were mostly religious although the sobriety which characterized previous church-oriented productions was no longer present. The "sacre rappresentazioni" were produced with as much pomp and colour as the limited machinery and facilities of the time would allow. They were fast-moving, "sans développement psychologique"²⁶ with a "mise en scène [. . .] naïve, mais aussi somptueuse que possible."²⁷ Apollinaire was particularly impressed by the attitudes of the public towards these productions: " . . . le peuple se montra avide de divertissements, où tout était mis en oeuvre pour lui plaire."²⁸ This latter statement provides a clue to Apollinaire's later philosophies on the theatre. For example, in the preface to Les Mamelles de Tirésias, he states one of his goals of writing:

Il [le drame] a comme but d'intéresser et d'amuser
C'est le but de toute oeuvre théâtrale²⁹

The playwright was equally impressed by the Italians' ability to mix successfully "tous les éléments scéniques: la religion y coïncide la trivialité: le tragique et le comique y contrastent; au désordre lyrique s'ajoutent les détails grotesques; les traits les plus raffinés apparaissent parfois dans les scènes où dominent les sentiments populaires."³⁰ It was through this same method that Apollinaire hoped to "infuser un esprit nouveau au théâtre"³¹ with Les Mamelles de Tirésias:

Selon les cas, le tragique l'emportera sur le comique ou inversement. Mais je ne pense pas que désormais, l'on puisse supporter, sans impatience, une oeuvre théâtrale où ces éléments ne s'opposeraient pas, car il y a une telle énergie dans l'humanité d'aujourd'hui et dans

les jeunes lettres contemporaines, que le plus grand malheur apparaît aussitôt comme ayant sa raison d'être, comme pouvant être regardé non seulement sous l'angle d'une ironie bien viellante qui permet de rire, mais encore sous l'angle d'un optimisme véritable qui console aussitôt et laisse grandir l'espérance.³²

In some ways, this merger of opposites is the simultaneism of which Apollinaire spoke and wrote in later years. The Italians managed to juxtapose different elements together successfully to produce a work of art in which "il s'agissait avant tout d'émerveiller le peuple et de l'amuser".³³ Is not this the surprise which he emphasized in "L'Esprit Nouveau et les Poètes?"

In the same way, the fact that these "sacre représentation" could enjoy "une fortune extraordinaire"³⁴ while at the same time remain "le plus souvent sans apparence dramatique"³⁵ shows that Apollinaire did not necessarily hold the "rules of dramatic art" in high esteem; a play could succeed without them. This will be important in the consideration of his plays, especially Couleur du Temps and Casanova, which did not succeed from the points of view of most drama critics. In them, and in Les Mamelles de Tirésias, Apollinaire's imagination ran wild in terms of sets and props.

The whole of Casanova was patterned after the commedia dell'arte. Apollinaire wanted to give the same air of bouffoonery and spontaneity of the seventeenth century comedies. Except for Casanova himself and Bellino, the characters were all masques of the commedia dell'arte: Arlequin, Arlequine, Colombine, Capitan, to name a few. The dialogue had the same qualities as that of the Italians: "la

vivacité" and "le naturel."³⁶ One might even go so far as to levy the same criticism against Apollinaire which he used against the Italians:

Le dialogue improvisé était invariablement d'une grande banalité et les acteurs se servaient toujours des mêmes plaisanteries, des mêmes répliques lorsque les circonstances étaient identiques.³⁷

Apollinaire did not write on the theatre again until May of 1917 when he was asked to write a program note for the coming production of Cocteau's Parade. It was in this article that the poet first used the word surrealism, vaguely indicating "une sorte de surréalisme."³⁸ Breunig felt this showed an uncertainty on the part of Apollinaire: "la locution vague qui précède le mot et le trait d'union à l'intérieur suggèrent que le poète venait de faire sa trouvaille au moment même où il compose son texte."³⁹ Cocteau had subtitled his play "ballet réaliste" but Apollinaire felt the term "réaliste" failed to express adequately what the production really involved. For Parade was not a play but a synthesis of many art forms resulting in "un poème scénique" much the same as Cocteau's later ideas of "poésie de théâtre."⁴⁰ And even though he had used the neologism "sur-réaliste" to describe Parade Apollinaire had not yet made a distinction between Cocteau's realism, cubism or surrealism in this article. For him, the essential quality of Parade was that it had attempted this mixture of the arts without falling into the traps of pantomime, symbolism or realism. It involved more than just presenting reality: "il s'agit avant tout de traduire la réalité."⁴¹ Probably quite unconsciously, Apollinaire was giving a definition of

surrealism, very close to that of André Breton, when he said:

. . . le motif n'est plus reproduit mais seulement représenté; il voudrait être suggéré par une sorte d'analyse-synthèse embrassant tous ses éléments visibles et quelque chose de plus, si possible, une schématisation intégrale qui chercherait à concilier les contradictions en renonçant parfois délibérément à rendre l'aspect immédiat de l'objet.⁴²

This was essentially a description of the cubist movement. Breton's later definition of surrealism was more concerned with the functioning of the mind rather than with objects, but he was saying, in essence, the same thing:

Le surréalisme repose sur la croyance à la réalité supérieure de certaines formes d'association négligées jusqu'à lui, à la toute-puissance du rêve, au feu désintéressé de la pensée. Il tend à ruiner définitivement tous les autres mécanismes psychiques et à se substituer à eux dans la résolution des principaux problèmes de la vie.⁴³

Apollinaire was certain of the favourable reaction that Parade would receive (although in reality the production was received very poorly by the critics). He admitted that the initial reaction would be one of surprise which would immediately change to one of approval: "on le [le procédé] verra dans Parade, avec un étonnement qui deviendra vite de l'admiration."⁴⁴ And again at the end of the article:

En somme, Parade renversera les idées de pas mal de spectateurs. Ils seront surpris certes, mais de la plus agréable façon et, charmés, ils apprendront à connaître toute la grace des mouvements modernes . . .⁴⁵

Apollinaire was already developing his later success formula of

"L'Esprit Nouveau et les Poètes." He was probably also attempting to

guide the reactions of the spectators towards a favourable acceptance of this new synthetic type of production because Les Mamelles de Tirésias, employing many of the same techniques as Parade, was to appear within a month. In the Prologue to his own play, Apollinaire pronounced the merits of "notre art moderne"⁴⁶ which brought together, as Parade had done:

. . . souvent sans lien apparent comme dans la vie
 Les sons les gestes les couleurs les cris les bruits
 La musique la danse l'acrobatie la poésie la peinture
 Les chœurs les actions et les décors multiples⁴⁷

The preface and the Prologue to Les Mamelles de Tirésias contain the best known of Apollinaire's dramatic theories. Essentially these two treatises synthesize many of the poet's critical ideas not only of the theatre but of all the arts. The preface in particular is an excursus in the *Esprit Nouveau* and Apollinaire uses his method of mystification to full advantage. He begins by modestly stating that most of the play was written in his youth (1903), a claim that has since been challenged by various critics.⁴⁸ He then qualifies the subtitle, "drame surréaliste":

Je l'ai appelé drame qui signifie action pour
 établir ce qui le sépare de ces comédies de
 mœurs, comédies dramatiques, comédies légères
 qui depuis plus d'un demi-siècle fournissent
 à la scène des oeuvres dont beaucoup sont ex-
 cellentes, mais de second ordre et que l'on
 appelle tout simplement des pièces.⁴⁹

He has used "drame" in its original Greek meaning to signify action, thus implying already an involvement kind of theatre. In so doing, Apollinaire has absolved himself of any set dramatic rules because "action" in the theatre is limitless. To further qualify his play,

he added the word "surréaliste" which, because it was of his own making, allowed him to set down his own rules as he proceeded. Tongue in cheek, he apologizes for having had to use the word: " . . . je me suis servi d'un néologisme qu'on me pardonnera car cela m'arrive rarement. . . ." ⁵⁰ It was a well-known fact, however, that Apollinaire was indeed in the habit of furnishing his own words when existing ones did not suffice.

The playwright further protects himself against unfavourable reactions by admitting that the play was written to satisfy "un effort personnel" and was not necessarily "une rénovation du théâtre." ⁵¹ The surrealism of the play consisted of a conscious personal effort to " . . . revenir à la nature même, mais sans l'imiter à la manière des photographes." ⁵² The process of surrealism, for Apollinaire, was analogous to the invention of the wheel:

quand l'homme a voulu imiter la marche, il a
créé la roue qui ne ressemble pas à une jambe.
Il a fait ainsi du surréalisme sans le savoir. ⁵³

Apollinaire grossly misrepresents his purpose insisting that he is not attempting to renovate the theatre, but merely to "mettre en relief une question vitale pour ceux qui entendent la langue dans laquelle il est écrit: le problème de la repopulation." ⁵⁴ It is here that he begins to mesmerize the audience. I have already mentioned that one of Apollinaire's main goals in all his works was to experiment, to create new ideas and theories. However, if he had stated this from the outset to the spectators of Les Mamelles de Tirésias they would have been wary of his intentions. He had to develop a pretext with which to camouflage his real purpose of ex-

perimenting with a new form of theatre: hence the emphasis on repopulation.

Apollinaire plays with this theme carrying to exaggeration its implications. Underlining a patriotic aspect of the play, "j'ai écrit mon drame surréaliste avant tout pour les Français comme Aristophane composait ses comédies pour les Athéniens,"⁵⁵ the playwright goes on to reproach the French for not producing enough children. Refuting two current explanations for the lack of fecundity in France (one being the increased use of contraceptives and the other the high level of alcoholism).⁵⁶ Apollinaire proposes his own explanation with a logic reminiscent of the theatre of the absurd:

La faute est plus grave, le vice est plus profond, car la vérité est celle-ci: on ne fait plus d'enfants en France parce qu'on n'y fait pas assez l'amour tout est là.⁵⁷

The solution? - "pour y remédier je leur [aux Français] ai indiqué qu'il suffisait d'en faire."⁵⁸

Towards the end of the preface, however, Apollinaire does allow his theatrical theories to materialize although they are now slightly obscured owing to the effects of his comic presentation of repopulation. The cinematic technique which was evident in "Zone" will also be used in his theatre: "cet art sera moderne, simple, rapide avec les raccourcis ou les grossissements qui s'imposent si l'on veut frapper le spectateur."⁵⁹ His outlook for the future of the theatre is very optimistic for he sees the melding of many forms to produce a truly modern work:

Selon le cas, le tragique l'emportera sur le comique ou inversement. Mais je ne pense pas que désormais l'on puisse supporter, sans impatience, une oeuvre théâtrale où ces éléments ne s'opposeraient pas, car il y a une telle énergie dans l'humanité d'aujourd'hui et dans les jeunes lettres contemporaines, que le plus grand malheur apparaît aussitôt comme ayant sa raison d'être, comme pouvant être regardé non seulement sous l'angle d'une ironie bienveillante qui permet de rire, mais encore sous l'angle d'un optimisme véritable qui console aussitôt et laisse grandir l'espérance.⁶⁰

And if the spectators have not learned from the preface what the author is trying to do, the Prologue serves to press his point still further. Apollinaire again emphasizes, this time in verse, that he is presenting:

. . . une pièce dont le but est de réformer les moeurs
Il s'agit d'enfants dans la famille⁶¹

The decline in population reminds him of the stars at night over a battlefield (" . . . comme le regard des nouveau-nés"⁶²) which are extinguished as soon as the guns and cannons start issuing forth their bright but deadly balls of fire. "ILS ETEIGNENT LES ETOILES A COUPS DE CANON"⁶³ he accuses, proposing his remedy immediately: "IL EST GRAND TEMPS DE RALLUMER LES ETOILES."⁶⁴ One can envision Apollinaire's enormous mocking grin when he says:

Et depuis ce soir-là j'allume aussi l'un après l'autre
Tous les astres intérieurs que l'on avait éteints⁶⁵

He himself has taken on the task of repopulating France.

For the first and only time, Apollinaire explicitly states his intentions to manipulate the audience. However, he does it in such a way as to catch them unaware so the warning will probably elude them. The tone of the play, he says, will be light and

familiar. The actors will adopt a similar manner and " . . . feront appel tout simplement à votre bon sens."⁶⁶ The spectators, revelling in this flattery, will probably misinterpret the next statement, a passage typical of Apollinaire's irony:

[Les acteurs] se préoccuperont avant tout de vous amuser
 Afin que bien disposés vous mettiez à profit
 Tous les enseignements contenus dans la pièce⁶⁷

Les Mamelles de Tirésias was the only play on which Apollinaire theorized directly. Couleur du Temps and Casanova were more the result of a spontaneous moment of creativity than a desire to demonstrate any theatrical theories. Nevertheless they each demonstrate different aspects of the author's ideas - poetic, artistic and theatrical. Part Three will examine each of the three plays in turn within the context of Apollinaire's aesthetics.

NOTES

¹Beigbeder, op. cit., p. 32.

²"Parade," O.C., Vol. 4, p. 444.

³Ibid., loc. cit.

⁴Ibid., pp. 444-445.

⁵Prologue to Les Mamelles de Tirésias, O.C., Vol. 3, p. 619.

⁶Pierre Albert-Birot was Apollinaire's contemporary and a poet, playwright and critic whose greatest contribution, according to Henri Béhar, was to have maintained "par son acharnement et sa connaissance du mécanisme de l'édition, l'une des deux plus importantes revues d'avant-garde en temps de guerre." [Béhar, p. 54] The revue, SIC, subtitled "Sons, idées, couleurs, formes," was responsible for the first production of Les Mamelles de Tirésias which Albert-Birot directed. In addition to the numerous poems and anecdotes in SIC, he composed four plays: Larountala, L'Homme coupé en morceaux, Le Bondieu and Les Femmes Pliantes. There are many similarities between Albert-Birot's theories and those of Apollinaire. Among other things he proposed the combined use of acrobats, music and photographic projections which would culminate in "un grand tout simultané." ["A Propos d'un théâtre nunique," SIC, nos. 8-9-10.

août-septembre-octobre, 1916, pages unnumbered.]

⁷"A propos d'un théâtre nunique," SIC, (Aug.-Sept.-Oct., 1916), pages unnumbered. In later years Antonin Artaud advocated a similar idea: "c'est pour prendre la sensibilité du spectateur sur toutes ses faces, que nous préconisons un spectacle tournant, et qui au lieu de faire de la scène et de la salle deux mondes clos, sans communication possible, réponde ses éclats visuels et sonores sur la masse entière des spectateurs." [Artaud, "Le Théâtre et son Double," Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. IV, p. 103.]

⁸It should be mentioned, however, that Apollinaire's faith in the theatre in the round could not surpass his hopes for the power of the cinema. According to Apollinaire it would be this new art form that eventually would succeed in amalgamating the arts: "le grand théâtre qui produit une dramaturgie totale c'est sans aucun doute le cinéma." ("Les Tendances Nouvelles," interview with Pierre Albert-Birot, SIC). And long before Marshall McLuhan, Apollinaire predicted the take-over of the literary world by the electronic media:

[Le livre] est à son déclin. Avant un ou deux siècles il mourra. Il aura son successeur, son seul successeur possible dans le disque de phonographe et le film cinématographique. On n'aura plus besoin d'apprendre à lire et à écrire.
(Interview with Gaston Picard, O.C., Vol. 3, p. 939)

⁹Béhar, op. cit., p. 46.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 49.

¹¹Birot, op. cit., loc. cit.

¹²Béhar, op. cit., p. 49.

¹³Jacques Rivière, "Renaissance à Dada," Nouvelle Revue Française, (août, 1920), pp. 400-401.

¹⁴O.C., Vol. 3, p. 609.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 610.

¹⁶Les Mamelles de Tirésias, O.C., Vol. 3, p. 646.

¹⁷Ibid., loc. cit.

¹⁸Béhar, op. cit., p. 47.

¹⁹Les Peintres Cubistes, O.C., Vol. 4, p. 15.

²⁰"L'Esprit Nouveau et les Poètes," O.C., Vol. 3, p. 908.

²¹Ugo Capponi, preface to Le Théâtre Italien, (Paris, 1910), p. 7.

²²Apollinaire, Le Théâtre Italien, (Paris, 1910), p. 16.

²³Ibid., loc. cit.

²⁴Ibid., p. 15.

²⁵Ibid., loc. cit.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 19-20.

²⁷Ibid., p. 20.

²⁸Ibid., p. 19.

²⁹O.C., Vol. 3, p. 609.

³⁰Le Théâtre Italien, p. 18.

³¹Les Mamelles de Tirésias, O.C., Vol. 3, p. 619.

³²Preface to Les Mamelles de Tirésias, p. 612.

³³Le Théâtre Italien, p. 20.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 18-19.

³⁵Ibid., p. 20.

³⁶Ibid., p. 33.

³⁷Ibid., p. 32.

³⁸O.C., Vol. 4, p. 444.

³⁹"Le sur-réalisme," Revue des Lettres Modernes, nos. 122-123, (1965), p. 25.

⁴⁰Jean Cocteau, Théâtre, (Paris, 1948), Vol. 1, p. 45.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 445.

⁴²Ibid., loc. cit.

⁴³André Breton, Manifestes du Surréalisme, (Paris, 1962), p. 40.

⁴⁴"Parade," O.C., Vol. 4, p. 445.

⁴⁵Ibid., loc. cit.

⁴⁶O.C., Vol. 3, p. 619.

⁴⁷Ibid., loc. cit.

⁴⁸This will be discussed at length in Chapter 6.

⁴⁹O.C., Vol. 3, p. 609.

Again one can notice the striking parallels between Apollinaire's complaints about the nineteenth century theatre and Victor Hugo's allegations against the pre-Romantic theatre in the Préface de Cromwell. Both artists were against a strictly realistic theatre,

arguing that a photographic drama lacked any substantial depth. While Apollinaire took exception to the "trompe-l'oeil" of the naturalist theatre, Hugo protested against flat mirror-like dramas:

D'autres, ce nous semble, l'ont déjà dit,
le drame est un miroir où se réfléchit la nature.
Mais si ce miroir est un miroir ordinaire, une
surface plane et unie, il ne renverra des objets
qu'une image terne et sans relief, fidèle, mais
décolorée: on sait ce que la couleur et la
lumière perdent à la reflexion simple. Il faut
donc que le drame soit un miroir de concentra-
tion qui, loin de les affaiblir, ramasse et
condense les rayons colorants, qui fasse d'une
lueur une lumière, d'une lumière une flamme.
Alors seulement le drame est avoué de l'art.
[Hugo, p. 45.]

⁵⁰Ibid., loc. cit.

⁵¹Ibid., loc. cit. This statement is ambiguous however because, as mentioned earlier, Apollinaire's theatre is in fact, a didactic one. Here he is intentionally misleading the audience through his now familiar mystification.

⁵²Ibid., loc. cit.

⁵³Ibid., loc. cit.

⁵⁴Ibid., loc. cit.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 611.

⁵⁶This passage reveals Apollinaire's supreme sense of humour

and deserves some examination. Through precise details (quotations from scientific journals, mentions of authors, references to neo-Malthusianism, etc.) Apollinaire overstates his case for repopulation. In essence, he is again drawing the reader's attention away from the main point of the Preface (that is, the renovation of the theatre):

M. Deffoux, écrivain spirituel, mais qui m'a l'air d'être un malthusien attardé, fait je ne sais quel rapprochement saugrenu entre le caoutchouc dont sont faits les ballons et les balles qui figurent les mamelles (c'est peut-être là que M. Basch voit un symbole) et certains vêtements recommandés par le néo-malthusianisme. Pour parler franc, ils n'ont rien à faire dans la question, car il n'y a pas de pays où l'on s'en serve moins qu'en France, tandis qu'à Berlin, par exemple, il ne se passe pas de jour qu'il ne manque de vous en tomber sur la tête pendant qu'on se promène dans les rues, tant les Allemands, race encore prolifique, en font un grand usage.

Les autres causes auxquelles avec la limitation des grossesses par moyens hygiéniques on attribue la dépopulation, l'alcoolisme par exemple, existent partout ailleurs et dans des proportions bien plus vastes qu'en France.

Dans un livre récent sur l'alcool, M. Yves Guyot ne remarquait-il pas que, si, dans les statistiques de l'alcoolisme, la France venait au premier rang, l'Italie, pays notoirement sobre, venait au second rang! Cela permet de mesurer la foi que l'on peut accorder aux statistiques; elles sont menteuses et bien fol est qui s'y fie. D'autre part n'est-il pas remarquable que les provinces où l'on fait en France le plus d'enfants soient justement celles qui viennent au premier rang dans les statistiques de l'alcoolisme!, [p. 611]

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 611-612.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 611.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 612.

⁶⁰Ibid., loc. cit.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 619.

⁶²Ibid., p. 617.

⁶³Ibid., p. 618.

⁶⁴Ibid., loc. cit.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 619.

⁶⁶Ibid., loc. cit.

⁶⁷Ibid., loc. cit.

PART III

THE PLAYS

CHAPTER VI

LES MAMELLES DE TIRESIAS

"Le poème des Mamelles de Tirésias élabore souvent ses transformations bouffones à partir de la mélancholie d'Apollinaire ou de sa consternation devant l'inertie et la médiocrité d'autrui. Sous sa désinvolture apparente s'installent des exigences humaines qui dépassent les impératifs d'une école et les excentricités d'une manifestation d'avant-garde."¹

[Jacqueline Bellas]

It is doubtful whether any single work of Apollinaire generated more scandal, controversy or misunderstanding than Les Mamelles de Tirésias. From June 24, 1917 when it was first produced until the present time, there have been no two critics who have agreed on an interpretation of the play. Moreover, considering the personality of the playwright himself, one can assert with relative safety that such mixed interpretations of the play would have been far from unwanted. With Les Mamelles de Tirésias, Apollinaire found the most direct and effective way to achieve his aims of mystification and surprise.

Chronologically, Les Mamelles de Tirésias is the first of Apollinaire's three plays. However there is a certain amount of controversy concerning the precise date the play was written. According to the playwright himself, the entire text with the exception of the Prologue and the last scene of Act Two was composed in 1903. Many critics accept this date with reservation; Décaudin for example cautions:

Il ne faut sans doute pas prendre à la lettre la déclaration d'Apollinaire selon laquelle la plus grande partie des Mamelles de Tirésias aurait été composée dès 1903. S'il n'est pas impossible en effet que des éléments anciens, datant de plus de dix ans, y aient été incorporés, la pièce n'a pas pris son aspect définitif qu'à la fin de 1916 et au début de 1917.²

Pascal Pia situates the play, or at least the ideas for the play, around 1914. At that time Apollinaire was publishing Le Poète Assassiné the fourth chapter of which contains a short scenario of a "pièce morale," just as Les Mamelles de Tirésias was.³ The plot concerns a miraculous operation which renders a sterile woman fertile.

Pia also asserts that not only the ideas but the style of Les Mamelles de Tirésias belongs to the period of Calligrammes (ie. 1916) rather than to 1903:

Sans parler de quelques détails (allusions aux Ballets Russes, au Vieux-Colombier, à la peinture de Braque) qui n'auraient pu figurer dans un texte de 1903, le style même des Mamelles de Tirésias n'appartient pas à une période lointaine de la vie d'Apollinaire. Les répliques de Thérèse [. . .] sont d'une écriture qui les apparente aux premiers poèmes de Calligrammes, et notre conviction est que, dans son ensemble, la pièce, où ont peut-être été fondues quelques pages redigées deux ou trois ans auparavant, n'a été véritablement composée qu'en 1916.⁴

In addition, there may have been a certain amount of defensiveness on the part of Apollinaire when he declared such an early date for his play. Les Mamelles de Tirésias was produced only a month after Cocteau's Parade which, because of its novelty, created a great tumult in the artistic world. Apollinaire, not wanting to appear to lag behind Cocteau, may have exaggerated the date of his play: " . . . si l'auteur a dit sa pièce plus vieille qu'elle ne l'était, il y a été poussé par le souci, puéril peut-être mais compréhensible, de ne pas paraître distancé par Cocteau dans des recherches où il avait effectivement précédé celui-ci."⁵

It is Pierre Albert-Birot, however, who provides the most concrete evidence that the play was in fact written after 1916. While Apollinaire was still in hospital recuperating from his head injury, Birot suggested the project of staging a play to Apollinaire. "J'en ai une," Apollinaire offered, "Les Mamelles de Tirésias."⁶ However, Birot, who produced and directed the play, affirms that it

was only the idea for the play that Apollinaire had:

En réalité, il n'avait que cette idée amusante:
une femme renonce aux ornements de son sexe, elle
ouvre son ouvrage, et ses deux seins - deux
ballons gonflés au gaz, ballons d'enfants - et
ses deux seins s'envolent. C'est sur cette idée
drôle, qu'après ma demande, il s'est attelé à
bâtir le drame comique qu'on connaît. . . .⁷

Birot had earlier affirmed in an article in SIC that Apollinaire revised the play considerably during the rehearsals and that " . . . la pièce telle qu'elle fut représentée n'a je pourrais presque dire aucun rapport avec la pièce qui servit de point de départ."⁸ What Apollinaire had written or thought out in 1903 was probably no more than the barest sketch of the final product.

He was very young and impressionable at the time (twenty-three) having only recently become embroiled in the activities of the Parisian bohemia. He was excited with the enterprising ideas of many of the avant-gardistes - especially Alfred Jarry. Many of Apollinaire's works of this period reflect the liaison between himself and Jarry. Margaret Davies speaks of a work entitled Le Jim-Jim-Jim des Capussins composed in 1903-4 which "apparently was pure Jarry."⁹ Although it was never published and the manuscript has not yet been found, Davies seems relatively certain that it furnished the ideas for Les Mamelles de Tirésias as well as for a chapter of Le Poète Assassiné entitled "Dramaturgie."¹⁰ In this latter work, the poet Cronimantal visits the Théâtres in the hope of producing his play Iéximal Jélimite. However, all he finds there is corruption and scandal, the only goal being money:

Le Théâtre, mes chers frères, est une école
de scandale, c'est un lieu de perdition pour
les âmes et pour les corps. Au témoignage
des machinistes tout est truqué dans un
théâtre.¹¹

These accusations may be a parody of the ideas of Antoine or more probably of Copeau who abhorred the use of elaborate machinery in the theatre.

The first performance of Les Mamelles de Tirésias was given in a converted music conservatory, the Conservatoire Maubel.¹² Under the auspices of the revue SIC, the single production was played before a full house whose invited audience consisted mainly of artists and critics. Evidently, Birot thought it might be difficult to fill the theatre although in reality he had to apologize in the June edition of SIC for having had to turn some people away:

Nous faisons toutes nos excuses aux personnes
qui n'ont pu entrer; c'est avec grand regret
que nous avons fermé les portes, mais le
nombre supplémentaire de spectateurs était
tel à l'intérieur du théâtre que nous avons
dû prendre cette décision radicale afin d'évi-
ter tout désordre dans la salle, voire même
des accidents.¹³

From this statement it seems that Birot was expecting a violent reaction to Les Mamelles de Tirésias similar to that of Ubu Roi in 1896.

Such, however, was not the case for the initial reaction to the play was a favourable one. Birot credited the success to "l'Esprit Nouveau" which " . . . s'oppose à ce vieux pessimisme d'après lequel tant de gens de lettres s'obstinent à régler leur conduite et leurs oeuvres."¹⁴ This may have been wishful thinking on the part of this critic who himself fell prey to Apollinaire's mysti-

fication. In the Prologue to the play, the author specifically states:

On tente ici d'infuser un esprit nouveau au théâtre
Une joi une volupté une vertu
Pour remplacer ce pessimisme vieux de plus d'un siècle¹⁵

If the purpose of a work of art is presented in such clear-cut, seemingly harmless yet irrefutable terms, the initial reaction is often one of acceptance. Such was the case at the performance of Les Mamelles de Tirésias. Unlike Ubu Roi in which Jarry had intentionally induced violent reactions from his audience by using offensive language and allusions, Les Mamelles de Tirésias is written in such unassuming language that the author's point is made very subtly. Apollinaire wins the spectator's confidence at the beginning of the play by stating:

C'est un sujet domestique
Et c'est pourquoi il est traité sur un ton familier
Les acteurs ne prendront pas de ton sinistre
Ils feront appel tout simplement à votre bon sens¹⁶

All that followed was thus taken in stride by the audience for a play treating "un sujet domestique" must certainly be beneficial. Any controversial topic which ensued, Apollinaire masked with humour, producing a laughter that was at once soothing ("soulageant de rire"¹⁷) and instructive ("un rire 'hénaurme' qui [. . .] instaure le monde de tous les possibles"¹⁸). In this sense, the Théâtre Maubel production was a complete success for the audience enjoyed the play even though many did not really understand it:

Et le rideau se releva plusieurs fois dans les acclamations du public, car ceux même qui sourds et aveugles n'avaient pas compris gardaient cependant sur leur visage l'impression ravie que laissait ce spectacle où se révéla pour la première fois par la parole lyrique

cet esprit nouveau dont on parle tant.¹⁹

The audience reacted as a whole to Apollinaire's work and his need to be "maître" was fulfilled. In a letter he wrote to Pierre Varenne the day after the performance, Apollinaire expressed his confidence in the success of the production:

La salle était comble. [. . .] Je crois que le succès a été franc et très net. Il n'y avait aucune claque d'aucune sorte et la salle vivait, vibrait admirablement. Je crois que même ceux qui étaient contre moi ne se sont pas ennuyés.²⁰

However after a few days of digesting what had happened, many of the critics in the audience were less prepared to accept Apollinaire's play so readily. Realizing at last that they had been duped, many of them wrote unfavourable or at least ambiguous reviews relying on the classical Aristotelian format of criticism to support them.

Léo Poldès of La Grimace was the most vehement of these, reproaching what he thought to be a certain hypocrisy and bad faith among the collaborators of the play. He specifically mentioned Eric Satie and Pablo Picasso, who had both worked on Cocteau's Parade and criticized the commercialism of these new artists camouflaged under the auspices of "pure art." His criticism of Apollinaire was more devastating yet:

Poète visionnaire et naïf, Guillaume Apollinaire dérange la critique, le Tout-Paris des premières, les rapins de la Butte et les ivrognes de Montparnasse pour assister à la plus extravagante, à la plus insensée des élucubrations du cubisme - alors que, faute de spectateurs, le Marchand de Venise a quitté l'affiche du Théâtre Antoine. Mieux encore. Au moment où la presse d'opinion manque de papier, où les journaux indépendants se voient menacés de disparaître, où la Pensée libre est traquée, on voit imprimée luxueusement, avec des caractères neufs et élégants,

une revue qui s'appelle SIC et où, pantins déliquescents du cubisme intégral, des clowns de la plume comme Albert-Birot et Jean Cocteau saccagent misérablement le papier accordé avec tant de parcimonie aux écrivains qui ont l'orgueil de combattre pour une idée.

Que les artistes me pardonnent, que la lecteur m'excuse, trois mots surgissent en guise de point final sous ma plume - et je les lance à la face de ces bateleurs: - Ah! les cochons!²¹

Davin de Champolos of Le Petit Bleu had only slightly less denunciatory words for the poet: "je dois être bigrement rétrograde, arriéré, poncif, tradionnaliste, abruti et réactionnaire, car cet esprit nouveau m'est apparu comme la plus effroyable des fumisteries et des galéjades. . . ." ²²

The critics who favoured the play (distinctly fewer in number than those opposed) were nevertheless just as adamant in their praise. They felt it marked the beginning of an entirely new era of art:

"c'est une date littéraire peut-être." ²³ Most of these critics were unable to isolate any single element of the play which appealed to them. It was more a general feeling of optimism for the future of art: "à la sortie, le ciel d'une pureté enfantine semblait tout à fait d'accord avec ce spectacle de la plus sage démente. Apollon saluait Apollinaire." ²⁴ For these critics, Les Mamelles de Tirésias had accomplished Apollinaire's aim of infusing the new spirit into the theatre.

The majority of criticism, however, was ambiguous. Realizing, perhaps, the power of a spectacle such as they had seen, these critics at the same time had reserved feelings on the "Esprit Nouveau," at least as far as the drama was concerned. An unsigned article in La

Griffe of July 6, 1917 is representative of this ambiguity:

Cette pièce est une sorte de coup de gong
et de coup de zanzibar, une parodie d'on
ne sait quoi, une charentonnade dédiée à
on ne sait qui, c'est du Jarry montmartrisé,
modernisé et martyrisé. C'est un appel à
l'amour, une cacophonie voulue par un poète,
une bravoure qui se moque des règles, des
lois, du qu'en dira-t-on. . .

.
Etait-ce un jeu de massacre ou de l'adoration?
Fut-ce une victoire ou une déroute?²⁵

The diversity of the criticism given Les Mamelles de Tirésias was, strangely enough, a desirable reaction in terms of Apollinaire's theories. "La surprise est le grand ressort nouveau,"²⁶ the poet was to say later in "L'Esprit Nouveau et les Poètes" and it was through this method that he succeeded in obtaining a reaction from the audience of Les Mamelles de Tirésias. The single common denominator which linked the diverse criticisms of the play was in fact surprise. Through the surprise created, Apollinaire wanted to manipulate the audience into his optimistic artistic mould.

His method of creating this surprise is typical of his "maître" complex noted in Chapter Five. By establishing himself in the position of ringleader of the theatre, Apollinaire was able to lead his audience through various stages of surprise: the mockery of women's liberation, the moralizing on the repopulation of France (which, around World War I, was a subject of deep concern to many Frenchmen), and the emphasis on the reforms of the theatre. As the spectator revels in the lyricism of the lines in the Prologue, the puns, and the various new theatrical tricks and techniques, the playwright is subtly instilling his ideas for a new optimistic art:

Douter ses facultés mentales, c'est ne pas vouloir comprendre la tactique qu'Apollinaire devait nécessairement adopter s'il voulait révolutionner l'art et s'établir dans sa position de maître des fêtes. Pour y parvenir il devait surprendre son public, lui parler comme faisaient les autres auteurs dramatiques, évoquer de graves problèmes moraux dans le goût de l'époque, pour l'amener, par l'étonnement, sur son propre terrain.²⁷

"Je vous apporte une pièce dont le but est de reformer les mœurs," Apollinaire declared in the Prologue. It is the most misleading yet truthful line in the play. For immediately afterwards he refers to repopulation, "il s'agit des enfants dans la famille,"²⁸ thus perpetrating the false goal of the play. The audience was susceptible to this propaganda and Apollinaire was able to become "le dieu créateur."²⁹ The critics were soothed by the gentle lyricism and profundity of such metaphorical lines as:

Les étoiles mouraient dans ce beau ciel d'automne
Comme la mémoire s'éteint dans le cerveau
De ces pauvres vieillards qui tentent de se souvenir
Nous étions là mourant de la mort des étoiles
Et sur le front ténébreux aux livides lueurs
Nous ne savions plus que dire avec désespoir

ILS ONT MEME ASSASSINES LES CONSTELLATIONS³⁰

With the audience half-mesmerized, it was relatively easy for Apollinaire to insert his theories on the theatre and the "Esprit Nouveau." The last lines of the Prologue bring together the stars metaphor with the theories of the new spirit:

Mais il y a encore là-bas un brasier
Où l'on abat des étoiles toutes fumantes
Et ceux qui les rallument vous demandent
De vous hausser jusqu'à ces flammes sublimes
Et de flamber aussi

O public

Soyez la torche inextinguible du feu nouveau³¹

As he so often did, Apollinaire has used language to juxtapose two very different themes - in this case, the themes of repopulation and "l'Esprit Nouveau." The reference to "les flammes sublimes" is probably borrowed from Les Peintres Cubistes: "[la flamme] a [. . .] la vérité sublime de sa lumière que nul ne peut nier."³² The "feu nouveau" is of course a piece of direct publicity for the author's new theories of "l'Esprit Nouveau."

Apollinaire chose a very simple plot line around which to build his other theories. It concerns a domestic situation in which Thérèse, the wife, becomes dissatisfied with her role as a woman and resents her husband's (who is only referred to as "le mari") efforts to keep her in the kitchen. She advocates the political, social and educational freedom for all women and wishes to practice male professions:

Je suis féministe et je ne reconnais pas l'autorité
de l'homme

.
Il y a assez longtemps que les hommes font ce qui
leur plaît

Après tout je veux aussi aller me battre contre les
ennemis

J'ai envie d'être soldat une deux une deux

.
. . . après avoir été soldat je veux être artiste
.

Je veux être aussi député avocat sénateur

Ministre président de la chose publique

Et je veux médecin physique ou bien psychique

Diafoirer à mon gré l'Europe et l'Amérique

.
Je veux être mathématicienne philosophe chimiste
Groom dans les restaurants petit télégraphiste³³

Then, in a grand cathartic moment, she opens her blouse loosing her breasts (which are actually children's balloons) into the audience.

When "le mari" arrives on stage with a bouquet of flowers for Thérèse, she has grown a moustache and a beard. As he does not recognize her, Thérèse announces her new status as a man and changes her name to Tirésias. She seizes her husband, exchanges clothes with him, ties him up and cuts her hair. While this action is taking place, Presto and Lacouf, characters completely extraneous to the main plot line, enter solemnly from the back of the house. When they arrive on stage they start an argument concerning their whereabouts - Zanzibar or Paris. This culminates in a duel in which they both fall to the floor only to be revived again a few moments later.

The husband is still tied up when a "gendarme" arrives. His efforts to have the policeman free him of his feminine fetters are thwarted because the "gendarme" mistakes "le mari" for "une belle fille"³⁴ whom he attempts to court. The husband's confusion and annoyance soon gives way to acquiescence:

Ma foi il a raison
Puisque ma femme est homme
Il est juste que je sois femme³⁵

Prompted by the policeman's encouragement that it makes no difference whether the husband is male or female ("Nonobstant quoi je pourrai vous épouser/Par procuration"³⁶) and by women's voices crying from the wings ("Plus d'enfants Plus d'enfants"³⁷) the husband takes the task upon himself to repopulate Zanzibar:

Revenez donc ce soir voir comment la nature
Me donnera sans femme une progéniture³⁸

At the beginning of the Second Act, the deed has been accomplished and "le mari" has reproduced 40,049 children in a single day. He holds a baby in each arm while the rest of the children are screaming in cradles strewn about the stage. To a Parisian journalist who has come to question the husband on his amazing feat, "le mari" explains that all his children are very successful: one is a millionaire; another has sold 600,000 copies of his first book entitled Quelle Chance!; a daughter, divorced from a "roi des pommes de terre,"³⁹ receives 100,000 dollars alimony; and yet another daughter is a poet whose verse brings her each year "ce qu'un poète gagne en cinquante mille ans."⁴⁰ The husband's principle rationale behind producing so many children is purely selfish:

En oui c'est simple comme un périscope
 Plus j'aurai d'enfants
 Plus je serai riche et mieux je pourrai me nourrir⁴¹

He vows to continue to reproduce and decides to make a journalist right on stage. Into an empty cradle he tosses sheets of torn newspaper, a pot of glue (which is to be transformed into blood and the brain), a penholder for the spinal column and a pair of scissors for the tongue. All of these objects are oversized. In the following scene, the son, spouting the latest world events, rises from the cradle.

The policeman returns in the next scene to announce to the husband that there is not enough food to feed all his children. To this the husband replies, "donnez-lui [ie. la population zanzibarienne] des cartes ça remplace tout."⁴² In the next scene Thérèse reappears in the guise of "la cartomancienne." She congratulates her

husband for his fecundity and scolds the policeman for not having produced any children. After strangling the "gendarme" she throws off her fortune teller's clothing and renounces her status as a man. Her husband, overjoyed, promises to end her physical condition which is "plate comme une punaise,"⁴³ and the play ends as they throw a basket of balloons into the audience.

Structurally, Les Mamelles de Tirésias is a rather weak play. In some ways it resembles the comedies of Aristophanes,⁴⁴ and has in fact been compared to these plays.⁴⁵ Aristophanes' comedies were generally structured around a two-part formula. The first part, the tolmêma,⁴⁶ presents the problem or project of the play and the second presents the solution and its consequences. The similarities between Les Mamelles de Tirésias and the Greek plays are evident. Act One presents the problem of repopulation as a result of women's liberation; Act Two presents the solution as proposed by the husband and its consequences. However, the plot is not fully adequate for this structure for it does not allow a large enough role for Thérèse who has been accorded a major part in the tolmêma. She disappears at the end of Scene Four in the first act (approximately one half of the way through the act) and does not reappear until the last scene of the play.

This, however, does not detract from the activities of "le mari" or Presto and Lacouf. Indeed the impact of the play comes from actions entirely separate from the principle plot line which serves only as a pretext. The greatest portion of the play is made up of elements which are not only often unrelated to each other but unre-

lated to the main conflict between Thérèse and "le mari" - for example, the presence of the "peuple de Zanzibar" whose responsibility is to interject "au moment opportun"⁴⁷ his noisemakers ("revolver, musette, grosse caisse, accordéon, tambour, tonnerre, grelots, castagnettes, trompette, d'enfant, vaisselle cassée"⁴⁸), the duelling of Presto and Lacouf or the Kiosque which moves, on its own power, across the stage. These are the elements which make Les Mamelles de Tirésias a surrealist play - at least insofar as Apollinaire understood the term. And it was this kind of juxtaposition of unrelated factors that was Apollinaire's hallmark in his poetry - labelled by him simultaneism.

The play consists of a series of these items taking various forms such as visual effects, puns or incongruities of accepted conceptions (such as the moveable kiosk). It is in this regard that Apollinaire has been accused of insincerity or at least of presenting "un simple divertissement."⁴⁹ That Apollinaire wished to amuse his audience cannot be questioned ("c'est le but de toute oeuvre théâtrale"⁵⁰); however his methods of amusing must be examined only within the context of his own theories and not under the exigencies of traditional criticism (that is, unities of time, space and action). Apollinaire himself in effect asserts this in the last stanza of the play:

Et puis chantez matin et soir
 Grattez-vous si ça vous démange
 Aimez le blanc ou bien le noir
 C'est bien plus drôle quand ça change
 Suffit de s'en apercevoir⁵¹

In simplest terms Apollinaire is advising the spectator to take the play at face value, to appreciate its moments individually and,

essentially, to allow the play to "do its own thing."

In Apollinaire's drama, things are not always what they seem to be (perhaps a remnant of Jarry's *Pataphysics*.) Identities become confused and are often reversed; space and time take on relative meanings; and words used in an absolute sense become an inadequate means of expression. These three elements - identity confusion, space-time relationships and the inherent ambiguity of words - are the main themes of Les Mamelles de Tirésias and deserve closer examination.

The ambiguity of Thérèse's identity stems from her desire to become a man. The only way she can do this is to change her physical attributes. This she does with adequate theatrical believability. The real confusion of her identity is, however, much more profound and involves the myth of Tirésias, whose sex changed to female for seven years. This desire to be at once man and woman reflects, according to Henri Béhar, the idea that " . . . en tout homme persiste l'androgynie initial qui pourrait assurer lui-même sa propre continuité."⁵² In Les Mamelles de Tirésias this image is extended to the husband, who also becomes man and woman, and to the "gendarme," who, appropriately enough, was played by a woman in the first production. And the image was not infrequent elsewhere in Apollinaire's works, for example Casanova and "La Chanson du Mal-Aimé".

The playwright carries the myth still further. At the end of the play Thérèse-Tirésias has become a fortune-teller, a seer, just as Tirésias was accorded prophetic powers by the gods who blinded him. In the myth Tirésias fathers Manto, also a prophet, and in the play, Thérèse is given the supreme powers of reproduction.

It is interesting to note that Thérèse is never fully able to rid herself of her feminine attributes. Even after she is dressed in her husband's clothing and has a beard and moustache she cannot stop clucking like a hen, a female animal. And when she sprouts her beard and moustache she utters a peculiarly ambiguous statement: "j'ai l'air d'un champ de blé qui attend la moissonneuse mécanique."⁵³ Her identification with the feminine symbol of the wheat field (of masculine gender) is opposed to the masculine symbol of the thresher (feminine gender). The inherent confusion of genders betrays Thérèse. Elsewhere, when she lists the male professions she wishes to have Thérèse again confuses the genders, wanting to be a "mathématicienne" yet a "petit télégraphiste."⁵⁴

For "le mari" and the "gendarme," the confusion of identities is also a sexual one. They are both influenced by purely physical features and accept a person as male or female from his or her external attributes. The "gendarme" does not care that the husband insists he is a man; it is sufficient that "le mari" is dressed in women's clothing. After some feeble protests the husband accepts his female status since his wife has become a man - a strangely logical reversal of identities. The husband carries his role change to its ultimate consequence - reproduction. But because Apollinaire has made of identity a purely relative matter, this is not an improbable fate.

The Parisian journalist provides quite a different sort of identity confusion which touches on satire. His face is featureless except for his mouth. He enters dancing to the music of an accordion

played by the "peuple de Zanzibar." He declares he is from Paris but calls this city "ville de l'Amérique."⁵⁵ This declaration together with the interjection of various English words such as "Hands up,"⁵⁶ "all right,"⁵⁷ or "my dear,"⁵⁸ and the American flag which he unfolds, all serve to confuse the audience's conception of a Parisian journalist. He is a caricature of what is presumed to be a typical newspaperman, reduced to essentials. This is extended further in exaggerated form when "le mari" reproduces a journalist son in a cradle. For his blood he tosses in a bottle of ink; his spinal column is an enormous pen; his brain a pot of glue and his tongue a pair of scissors.⁵⁹

Presto and Lacouf provide probably the most unusual identity confusions. From a technical point of view they are nothing but stretching devices. They play no part in the plot whatsoever but resemble circus clowns whose function is to divert the attention of the audience from some other action. For example in Scene Four of the first act when Thérèse changes clothes with "le mari," Presto and Lacouf carry on a duel over their location, Paris or Zanzibar, thus averting the possible awkwardness of the actions of Thérèse and "le mari". And in Scene Six of the same act, Presto and Lacouf carry on a similar duel while the policeman unties the husband.

The arguments between Presto and Lacouf result each time in a duel. The "peuple de Zanzibar" fires a shot and they both fall. The shot is timed exactly so that it ends the Presto-Lacouf action and reintroduces the action of Thérèse-"le mari." The first shot is fired just as Thérèse is finished changing clothes. Upon hearing the shot she makes a start and cries out, "ah chère liberté te voilà en-

fin conquise."⁶⁰ The second shot occurs as the policeman finishes untying the husband. The noise attracts his attention and he calls to Presto and Lacouf "je vous arrête."⁶¹ By integrating the two actions on stage, Apollinaire has also integrated two identity concepts. The sound of the shot has a different meaning for each character depending on his particular situation. And by making the deaths of Presto and Lacouf very brief, the playwright has confused the audience's notion of death. In the theatrical world of Apollinaire, however, this is quite acceptable for nothing has a fixed identity or purpose.

Identity confusions in Les Mamelles de Tirésias are not confined to people. Objects are also used in a relative manner; they fit the context in which they are presented simply because Apollinaire gives them a logical function in the situation. For example, the Kiosque, which has a face painted on it, has only a moveable arm to carry on the selling operations rather than a live person. Yet in Scene Eight of the first act, during a discourse by "le mari" on the merits of repopulating France, the Kiosque "se déplace lentement vers l'autre bout de la scène."⁶² In Apollinaire's theatrical universe, one can never be sure of anything and thus the absurd action of the Kiosque is an ironic understatement to the husband's opening line to the policeman, "fameux représentant de toute autorité."⁶³ The notion of authority is completely abolished since even inanimate objects have the ability to move.

In the same way, the noisemakers which the "peuple de Zanzibar" employs serve to punctuate the action of the play either by underlining and emphasizing it (for example, hitting the bass drum

when the women's voices call for "plus d'enfants plus d'enfants"⁶⁴) or by ironically understating it (for example ringing the little bells as the crying of the babies increases⁶⁵).

And probably one of the most effective scenes of the play is the third scene of Act One in which Thérèse announces her decision to move out of the house. While her husband stands patiently outside her window, she tosses successively out the window a chamber pot, a urinal and a basin. "Le mari" picks each one up calling them the piano, the violin and the butter plate respectively. There is probably no symbolic relationship between the items and what the husband calls them, but the scene provides the best example of cubist drama in the play. According to the Cubists, an object's essence was "in the eye of the beholder" and thus the chamber pot can quite conceivably be called a piano by "le mari."

Apollinaire's treatment of time and space in Les Mamelles de Tirésias is handled in a like manner. For example the problem of whether Presto and Lacouf are in Paris or Zanzibar provides the basis for a pun which is perpetuated throughout the play. During Apollinaire's time there was a gambling game called "zanzibar" or "zanzi" popular in Paris. To begin the confusion of the word, the playwright situates the play in Zanzibar and augments the obvious pun by placing a megaphone in the form of a dice box decorated with dice at the front of the stage. Presto argues that they are in Zanzibar since they have lost everything in a game of "zanzi" while Lacouf insists they are in Paris. After they duel, the "peuple de Zanzibar" places two placards, which appear like epitaphs, to either side of the stage:

Pancarte pour Presto

COMME IL PERDAIT AU ZANZIBAR MONSIEUR
 PRESTO A PERDU SON PARI PUISQUE NOUS
 SOMMES A PARIS

Pancarte pour Lacouf

MONSIEUR LACOUF N'A RIEN GAGNE PUISQUE
 LA SCENE SE PASSE A ZANZIBAR AUTANT QUE
 LA SEINE PASSE A PARIS⁶⁶

The ambiguity created by the puns of Zanzibar, "scène-Seine," and "pari-Paris" serve to augment both the confusion of place and the ambiguity of language.

Time is also treated in a Cubist manner as revealed by the husband's reproduction of 40,050 children in a single day. This Rabelaisian exaggeration is carried still further with the discovery that these babies have also accomplished feats of an adult. And when the husband creates his journalist-son right on stage, the latter rises from his cradle a full-grown person, able to relate the news events of the day.

The ambiguity of words, the third principle theme of the play, is expressed mainly through the use of puns and plays on words. By giving language added dimensions, Apollinaire points to the inherent richness of words overlooked by many people. For the most part, they have an immediate humorous effect as well as an effect of perpetrating the whole air of ambiguity prevalent in the play. The first example

of this is contained in the Prologue when the Directeur says:

Ecoutez ô Français la leçon de la guerre
Et faites des enfants vous qui n'en faisiez guère⁶⁷

These lines should abolish any notion that a spectator may have concerning Apollinaire's seriousness about repopulation.

In the first scene of the play, the following sequence of lines between Thérèse on stage and "le mari" off stage provide another pun:

VOIX DU MARI:

Donnez-moi du lard je te dis donnez-moi du lard
(Vaisselle cassée)

THERESE:

Vous l'entendez il ne pense qu'à l'amour⁶⁸

On one hand, the husband's line conjures up an image of the henpecked counterpart of a feminist, banished to the kitchen where he is forced to cook and do dishes (a vision augmented by the "vaisselle cassée"). On the other hand, the confusion between the request for bacon and the expression "rentrer dans le lard à quelqu'un," meaning to be enamoured with someone, shows Apollinaire's mistrust of language which is not taken at face value.

In Scene Seven of Act One the husband's attempts to explain to the policeman the fate of Thérèse give rise to the following sequence of misunderstandings:

LE MARI:

Elle est soldat ministre merdecin

LE GENDARME:

Mère des seins

LE MARI:

Ils ont fait explosion mais elle est plutôt merdecin

LE GENDARME:

Elle est mère des cygnes

Ah! combien chantent qui vont périr⁶⁹

This kind of witty misuse of language provides an absurd background for the circus-like atmosphere of the play. Les Mamelles de Tirésias does in fact have the essence of a three-ring circus in which unrelated events can occur simultaneously in apparent contradiction to one another. Les Mamelles de Tirésias was probably the last work of Apollinaire which succeeded in sustaining this light spontaneous atmosphere. Couleur du Temps, his second play, was of an entirely different spirit - very pessimistic and unlike anything Apollinaire had written before. And even Casanova, a comedy in the Italian style, seemed too calculated to attain the level of light-heartedness found in Les Mamelles de Tirésias.

NOTES

¹Jacqueline Bellas, "Les Mamelles de Tirésias en Habit d'Arlequin," La Revue des Lettres Modernes, nos. 123-126, (1965), p. 32.

²Michel Décaudin, "Les Mamelles de Tirésias," in Oeuvres Complètes de Guillaume Apollinaire, Vol. 3, p. 926.

³Le Poète Assassiné, O.C., Vol. 1, p. 235.

⁴Pascal Pia, Apollinaire par lui-même, (Paris, 1954), p. 165.

⁵Ibid., p. 162.

⁶Quoted by Pierre Albert-Birot, "La Naissance et Vie de SIC," Les Lettres Nouvelles, no. 7 (septembre, 1953), p. 853.

⁷Pierre Albert-Birot, "La Naissance et Vie de SIC," pp. 853-854.

⁸P. Albert-Birot, "Couleur du Temps," SIC, III, no. 36, (décembre no. 2, 1918), n.p.

⁹Davies, op. cit., p. 95.

¹⁰Ibid., loc. cit.

¹¹O.C., Vol. 1, p. 259.

¹²The exact details of this production, including such things as program format, names of actors, etc., can be found in Pierre-Marcel Adéma's "Les Mamelles de Tirésias, Essai Bibliographique," La Revue des Lettres Modernes, nos. 123-126, (1965), pp. 55-63.

¹³Albert-Birot, "Le 24 juin 1917," SIC, II, no. 18, (juin, 1917), n.p.

¹⁴Ibid., loc. cit.

¹⁵O.C., Vol. 3, p. 619.

¹⁶Ibid., loc. cit.

¹⁷Breton, Les Pas Perdus, (Paris, 1924), p. 44.

¹⁸Béhar, op. cit., p. 53.

¹⁹Albert-Birot, op. cit., loc. cit.

²⁰O.C., Vol. 4, p. 886.

²¹Quoted in SIC, II, nos. 19-20, (juillet-août, 1917), n.p.

²²Quoted in SIC, II, nos. 19-20, (juillet-août, 1917), n.p.

²³Jean de Gourmont, "Une esthétique nouvelle," Mercure de France, quoted in SIC, op. cit., loc. cit.

²⁴Guillot de Saix, La France, 29 juin, 1917, quoted in SIC,
op. cit., loc. cit.

²⁵Quoted in SIC, op. cit., loc. cit.

²⁶O.C., Vol. 3, p. 906.

²⁷Béhar, op. cit., p. 46.

²⁸O.C., Vol. 3, p. 619.

²⁹Ibid., p. 620.

³⁰Ibid., p. 618.

³¹Ibid., p. 621.

³²O.C., Vol. 4, p. 16.

³³O.C., Vol. 3, pp. 622-623.

³⁴Ibid., p. 631.

³⁵Ibid., p. 632.

³⁶Ibid., p. 633.

³⁷Ibid., p. 634.

³⁸Ibid., p. 636.

³⁹Ibid., p. 641.

⁴⁰Ibid., loc. cit.

⁴¹Ibid., loc. cit.

⁴²Ibid., p. 646.

⁴³Ibid., p. 650.

⁴⁴It could even be suggested that Apollinaire borrowed the whole idea for his play from Aristophane's Ecclesiazusae. In this work, the Athenian women attempt a take-over of the Ecclesia or assembly by dressing up in men's clothing, donning beards, and masquerading as members of the assembly (composed only of men). They succeed in this and immediately pass a law which gives women ultimate power of the state.

⁴⁵Guillot de Saix, op. cit., loc. cit.

⁴⁶Douglass Parker, Introduction to Aristophanes' The Congress-women (Ecclesiazusae), (Ann Arbor, 1967), p. 2.

⁴⁷O.C., Vol. 3, p. 621.

⁴⁸Ibid., loc. cit.

⁴⁹Béhar, op. cit., p. 47.

⁵⁰Préface to Les Mamelles de Tirésias, O.C., Vol. 3, p. 609.

⁵¹O.C., Vol. 3, p. 650.

⁵²Béhar, op. cit., p. 51.

⁵³O.C., Vol. 3, p. 624.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 623.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 638.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 637.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 640.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 641.

⁵⁹This reference to the tongue as a pair of scissors has a double meaning. On the one hand, the playwright alludes to the cutting qualities of scissors; on the other, he alludes to the forked shape of the scissors thus the false qualities of a journalist.

⁶⁰O.C., Vol. 3, p. 628.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 631.

⁶²Ibid., p. 634.

⁶³Ibid., loc. cit.

⁶⁴Ibid., loc. cit.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 637.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 628.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 619.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 622.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 632.

CHAPTER VII

COULEUR DU TEMPS

"Apollinaire was no dramatist, and Couleur du Temps makes sad reading."¹

[Margaret Davies]

"In Couleur du Temps, [. . .], there remains little more than the author's war-inspired and maudlin sentiment."²

[David Grossvogel]

"Couleur du Temps [. . .] was hardly creative."³

[Bettina Knapp]

In the light of the condemnation of Davies, Grossvogel and Knapp, the value of Couleur du Temps as a theatrical work of art would appear to be dubious. The general feeling towards the play, at least of the modern critics, is that, while it may contain many themes and "poetry firmly stamped by his [Apollinaire's] seal,"⁴ it is a work of doubtful dramatic worth. But as with many of Apollinaire's works, the artistic value of this play should not be judged out of context. No complete analysis of the play has been done and criticisms of the kind mentioned above are too hasty.

Couleur du Temps is usually compared to Les Mamelles de Tirésias which, in terms of volume of criticism, at least, was a much more successful play. The publicity surrounding the production of Apollinaire's first play was designed to promote the new genre of theatre; Couleur du Temps, on the other hand, was a totally different type of play and was produced only as a tribute to the author. It was not publicized as widely as Les Mamelles de Tirésias.

It was written about a year after Les Mamelles de Tirésias, and was produced a month after the poet's death. Marcel Adéma, who knew Apollinaire, felt the play was written in order to win over the critics who had almost unanimously condemned his earlier play:

Sensible aux critiques soulevées par les Mamelles et sans doute convaincu qu'il est encore trop tôt pour trouver un public à d'aussi audacieuses formules, Apollinaire écrit une nouvelle pièce, Couleur du Temps.⁵

This in part explains why Couleur du Temps differs so markedly in style from Les Mamelles de Tirésias. In the earlier work, Apollinaire

attempted to mystify and manipulate the spectators, playing on their susceptibility in order to expound his thesis on the theatre; in Couleur du Temps, there is a definite absence of any theorizing on the theatre. Instead, Apollinaire presents us with a truly didactic play (that is, in the speeches themselves) which professes a thesis similar to that of certain Symbolists, as will be seen later.

Pierre Albert-Birot provides the best, certainly the most acceptable, reason for the failure of Couleur du Temps. The play was staged posthumously by La Compagnie Art et Liberté. The production was intended to be played only once, in tribute to the late poet. According to Birot, in his article in SIC, Apollinaire died before the first draft had been revised. Because the poet had not polished and altered it as he was accustomed to do, the actors, although sincere, were guilty of producing an incomplete work not representative of the wishes of Apollinaire: ". . . plus ils [les acteurs] se sont efforcés vers leur perfection plus ils se sont éloignés de celle d'Apollinaire."⁶ As noted in Chapter Six, Apollinaire worked very closely with the actors of Les Mamelles de Tirésias, often making major textual changes during the rehearsals. The final product, according to Birot, who attended most of the rehearsals himself, did not at all resemble the original version: ". . . je puis affirmer que la pièce telle qu'elle fut représentée n'a je pourrai presque dire aucun rapport avec la pièce qui servit de point de départ."⁷

However Apollinaire did not attend any of the rehearsals of Couleur du Temps (which began a few days before his death) nor had any of his friends undertaken to direct the production.⁸ "Dans ces

conditions," Birot concludes, "la pièce que nous allons voir ne sera pas d'Apollinaire."⁹ The intentions of the actors, although in good faith, were not those of the poet. Birot implies that had Apollinaire supervised the rehearsals, the troupe would not have fallen into the trap of interpreting the play according to the exigencies of the realistic theatre. The "conception surréaliste"¹⁰ that Apollinaire manifested in Les Mamelles de Tirésias could have been continued in Couleur du Temps had he been alive to gear the production his way. What occurred was inevitable - a production devoid of the usual sparkle of the playwright:

De ce qui devait s'étaler comme une fresque on a fait un petit dessin d'illustration, et cela était inévitable puisque la conception des acteurs n'est pas celle de l'auteur.¹¹

The global impression one receives from Couleur du Temps is that it is a play of profound pessimism and absolute fatalism. This type of determinist philosophy was foreign to Apollinaire; the play refutes all his former confidence in art, science, history, and philosophy. The poet, Nyctor, although still believing himself to be divine, fails in his pursuit of an Ideal as do all the other characters. The leitmotiv "Adieu Adieu il faut que tout meure" reflects the atmosphere of the entire play. Why this sudden reversal occurred is a matter for speculation. The most plausible reason, shared by Roger Shattuck¹² and Marcel Adéma¹³ suggests that all of Apollinaire's work after he was wounded in the head in 1916 reflected this pessimism.¹⁴ According to Marcel Adéma:

Le ton général de la pièce est révélateur du bouleversement moral d'Apollinaire; sa blesure a amplifié un pessimisme latent, visible auparavant dans les accents mélancoliques de certains de ses poèmes.¹⁵

This author also suggests that the loss of both Lou and Madeleine was partially responsible for Apollinaire's sudden preoccupation with materialism in Couleur du Temps:

La crise sentimentale Lou-Madeleine l'a aussi fortement ébranlé, il semble résolu à tirer un trait sur le passé et repartir sur une base nouvelle, très matérielle cette fois.¹⁶

Couleur du Temps, in contrast to Les Mamelles de Tirésias, was "une pièce pour l'élite" and not "une pièce pour la masse"¹⁷ as "Art et Liberté" interpreted it. Of the people who saw the production, Albert-Birot estimates that only ". . . deux ou trois peut-être se sont nettement rendu compte de ce que ce drame fut devenu si Apollinaire avait pu le pétrir sur la scène."¹⁸ The solution was to leave the play in book form:

. . . il faut tout simplement publier [. . .] ce canevas de pièce avec beaucoup d'autres travaux inachevés qu'on trouvera sans doute dans ses papiers; c'est là que les esprits qui en sont dignes eussent été chercher Couleur du Temps, l'étudier et l'aimer dans la pureté, dans la paix du livre.¹⁹

In this sense perhaps the modern critics are right to shun the possibilities of a successful production of the play. Nevertheless, to pass it off as an experience in "sad reading"²⁰ which is "hardly creative"²¹ is still unwarranted criticism. In the light of what Albert-Birot says, it is a play which, although better read than staged, is worthy of analysis as a dramatic work if one takes into consideration how the author might have directed it in terms of surre-

alism or "l'Esprit Nouveau."

A definition of the dramatic action of Couleur du Temps can be arrived at through an analysis of the essential incidents in the plot. Generally, it concerns the flight of three men - Ansaldin de Roulpe, a scientist, Van Diemen, an elderly rich man, and Nyctor, a poet - from their native country which is ravaged by war. Piloted by Ansaldin, an airplane takes the three men from country to country in search of Peace. En route, they pick up the mother and fiancée of a dead soldier and "un solitaire" who has been exiled for ten years on an equatorial island. They finally arrive at the South Pole whose still, white splendour becomes their image of eternal Peace:

La blancheur souveraine qui brille
Partout est l'image de la paix²²

They believe that they have found their Ideal with the discovery of the body of a beautiful woman frozen in an iceberg. The dispute over possession of the woman causes the death of all four men. Mavise, the fiancée, sums up the fatal quest for Peace as "cette paix homicide."²³

The play opens with Ansaldin, Van Diemen and Nyctor preparing to leave. Ansaldin hurries the other two as he feels death is stretching out trying to envelop them:

Je crois qu'il est bien temps de partir
Car sous peu le règne de la mort
S'étendra jusqu'ici²⁴

This is the first ironic hint of what will be the eventual fate of the travellers: in their frantic efforts to escape death, they rush headlong towards it. The initial incident of the play, then - the decision to leave the country in search of Peace - takes place before

the representation of the play begins.

Nyctor is the only one of the three who hesitates to leave. Peace, he says, comes in being patriotic and in living a full life in one's own country:

On y [dans la patrie] jouit en paix de la vie
Et l'on y meurt encore en paix²⁵

And, in the manner of an Apollinairian poet, he predicts what fate will befall the three men:

. . . un pressentiment me dit
Qu'en partant nous allons à la mort²⁶

Nyctor feels that because poets are "l'âme de la patrie"²⁷ they are obligated to remain always with their people as mouthpieces of all that they "peuvent ressentir de sublime."²⁸

Van Diemen, in his infinite wisdom, convinces Nyctor to go with them because, by leaving, they are actually saving the soul of the motherland:

En partant nous sauvons avec nous
L'âme même de notre patrie
Comme fit Enée en quittant Troie
Et Rome naquit de ce départ
Une Rome nouvelle monte en nous
.
Partez partez pour sauver votre oeuvre
Elle est votre patrie sauvez-là²⁹

Nyctor is susceptible to this idea of a mission and, although he is not happy about going, he consents to go, the true Apollinairian martyr:

Je me rends enfin vous l'importez
Hélas³⁰

The second scene of the first act takes place "entre ciel et terre,"³¹ a scene along the lines of Les Mamelles de Tirésias. It is

probably the most "surrealistic" element of the play, visually at least. The actors were suspended from the ceiling so that only their legs were visible to the audience. In this scene (and one wonders if Apollinaire wasn't amusing himself immensely), Nyctor expounds the ecstasies of flying which call to him to sing the hymns of the heavens:

. . . il me semble
 Que si je chantais à présent l'hymne du ciel
 Je prendrais à mon chant un si noble plaisir
 Que je m'arrêterais pour l'entendre vibrer

 Les ondes de mon chant assaillent le silence
 Le silence infini et l'immobilité³²

Interspersed among Nyctor's chants are Ansaldin's and Van Diemen's down-to-earth, practical warnings for the poet to be careful. There is little doubt here that Apollinaire enjoyed poking fun at the chimerical visionary world of the poet when Ansaldin says:

Il [Nyctor] s'élève à mesure
 Que nous nous élevons³³

or Van Diemen's:

Nyctor ne vous penchez pas

 Nyctor Nyctor regardez au ciel³⁴

The major incident in this scene is the decision to return to the earth briefly so that Nyctor can

. . . connaître sur le sol
 Le danger enivrant. . .³⁵

Apollinaire's desire to be placed in the midst of the action had been prevalent since his pre-war days. The poems of Calligrammes and the letters to Madeleine bear witness to his need to play an integral part in the war. The celebration of the horrors of war are reminiscent of his war poems and correspondence. Nyctor wants to partake of

this horrifying yet mystical beauty one last time before they depart:

La terrible magie
De cette ardente lutte
Me retiendra en bas
Quelques instants à peine
Puis je romprai le charme
Et nous repartirons³⁶

The third scene reveals Madame Giraume and Mavise lamenting the death of their soldier. Madame Giraume feels that a part of her has died with him and in an almost incestual rite she bemoans their dual fate:

Mon fils une grappe de raisin
Dont on a exprimé tout le vin
Et ce vin précieux ils l'ont bu
Ils sont ivres voyez écoutez
Ils en sont tous ivres de ce vin
De ce vin mon sang mon sang vermeil³⁷

Mavise feels that by dying, her fiancé has left her with the responsibility of carrying his soul into the future:

Mon amour pour toi contient tout
Les grandes raisons de ta mort
Et cet amour qui naît d'elle³⁸

At the end of the scene the two women, together with the chorus, consisting of the voices of the dead and the living, lament the death of love. This portion of the scene is done in cubist fashion, each character saying a different speech simultaneously with the others. The scene terminates on the fatalistic note of the chorus:

C'est le crépuscule de l'amour
Et qu'important qu'important les hommes
Qu'important les frelons à la ruche
Qu'important gloire richesse amour
Et qu'important qu'important les hommes
Adieu adieu il faut que tout meure³⁹

Scene Four serves mainly to show the attempts of Ansaldin and

Van Diemen to convince the two women to go with them. Nyctor sees them as a burden and a hindrance to his dreams:

C'est une compagnie imprévue
Mais la femme est l'ennemie du rêve
Et je vais peut-être m'ennuyer
Moi qui jamais jamais ne m'ennuie⁴⁰

Ansaldin threatens Nyctor who wants to reveal their plans of going to the South Pole to Mavise and Madame Giraume. The poet, once again the abused martyr, gives in:

Je suis sans volonté Ansaldin
Et je me trouve à votre merci⁴¹

The women decide to go, not caring where ("Ailleurs") and the act closes with the interminable line of the Voix des Morts et des Vivants: "Adieu Adieu il faut que tout meure."⁴²

Act Two takes place on a deserted island somewhere on the equator near Africa. In Scene One Van Diemen explains to Madame Giraume where they are and why they have come:

Nous aimons la paix et nous fuyons
Les pays qu'elle n'habite pas⁴³

The play on "paix:pays" is expressive of the ironic situation of the entire play. In their desperate attempts to find peace they flee their own country where, in fact, peace is to be found. Peace can be found by not searching for it.

For Van Diemen the loss of individual freedom in the homeland was the principal motive for leaving:

Là-bas d'où nous venons un homme n'est plus rien
Là-bas l'individu n'est qu'une particule⁴⁴

He senses the stifling atmosphere of the machine age and its adverse effects on the creativity and individuality of man - a thought current

to the philosophy of that time:

Il pense mais il est l'esclave des machines
Les trains dictent leurs lois à l'homme dans l'horaire⁴⁵

What Van Diemen seeks is Tönnies' Gemeinschaft,⁴⁶ an individual liberty away from "civilization."

Madame Giraume serves as a sounding board for Van Diemen. She is at first incredulous at finding herself on a deserted island; then, as Van Diemen reassures her of a safe future with them, she becomes the subservient woman that Apollinaire idealized:

Ce que vous m'apprenez m'étourdit
Et il faut que je m'y habitue
Et puis oui vous avez eu raison
.
Les femmes sont faites pour la paix⁴⁷

At the end of the scene she envisages Van Diemen as her saviour, her liberator:

Je vous écoute comme on écoute
Son libérateur ce que vous dites
Me cause une allégresse infinie
Un plaisir⁴⁸

In Scene Two Ansaldin de Roulpe confronts Mavise on the idea of Duty. Mavise is angry because the women were tricked into going on the airplane under pretext of being taken safely home. Ansaldin, completely confident, assures her that he was only leading them away from death:

Nous vous avons sauvées de la mort
Et de la plus affreuse tristesse
Qu'auriez-vous fait là-bas dites-moi
Simples cellules madréporiques
Des atolls monstrueux et dolents
Qui montent à la surface affreuse
Du tragique océan humain⁴⁹

The pun on "madréporiques" is indicative of Ansaldin's attitude towards women. On one hand, he respectfully compares them to the madrepores which form part of oceanic coral reefs; on the other hand, he plays on "madre" as mother and "madré" meaning sly or cunning, thus insulting motherhood. The mistrust which this reference to reproduction shows may be a remnant, although in a much more bitter form, of Apollinaire's mockery of the subject in Les Mamelles de Tirésias.

Ansaldin tries to console Mavise by comparing her to the fruitful earth where:

Par hasard et par mille chimies
Se forment des pierres précieuses
Qui taillées et polies sont si belles⁵⁰

However, the comparison is hollow, typical of Ansaldin's lack of human perception. For Mavise, the only beauty is in "le devoir accompli"⁵¹ which is brought about by remaining loyal to one's country:

le Devoir
C'est de rester là-bas
.....
De panser les blessures
De consoler les coeurs⁵²

In an interview with Pierre Albert-Birot two years before he wrote Couleur du Temps, Apollinaire had advocated a nearly identical idea. The lesson to be learned from the war was in exalting one's country through art:

Quoi de plus beau du reste que de chanter les
héros et la grandeur de la patrie. Quoi de
plus beau que d'inspirer de nobles sentiments
aux générations à venir, quoi de plus noble
qu'en rappelant les expériences de la guerre
forcer les gouvernants à se jamais oublier
que nous devons être forts si nous voulons
exercer librement les arts de la paix et nous
élever dans ces arts.⁵³

One can witness the change in Apollinaire's thought from this initial very optimistic faith in the merits of war, and the eventual failure to attain the ideals in Couleur du Temps.

Scene Three is a soliloquy by Mavise who weighs the merits of remaining with the men to search for their Ideal against returning to her country to fulfill her duty. However, she suddenly feels a new duty to remain because of a recent, rather maternal attraction to Nyctor:

Mais j'hésite à partir
Comme un nouveau devoir
A surgi dans mon âme
A grandi dans mon coeur
Un devoir vis-à-vis
De cet enfant Nyctor
Qui se tient à l'écart
Honteux d'être parti
Honteux d'être poète
Honteux d'être vivant⁵⁴

For Apollinaire's woman, then, duty lies not necessarily in remaining in the homeland but in accepting her role as a mother. Although Mavise feels she is needed in her war-ravaged homeland, she nevertheless is overpowered by her maternal instinct towards Nyctor. For her, "la patrie" is wherever she feels needed.

In the fourth scene Mavise tells Nyctor of her faith in him and in his prophetic powers:

Votre regard m'enivre Nyctor
Et vous devinez bien mes pensées
L'humanité tout entière parle
Par votre voix si harmonieuse
L'humanité dont je suis l'épouse
Depuis que mon fiancé est mort⁵⁵

She feels an affinity with Nyctor because they both find solace in the inherent battles of humanity:

un bonheur
 Fondé sur le devoir accompli
 Et sur la liberté de chercher
 La lutte mais oui toujours la lutte
 De l'humanité contre mon coeur
 De mon cerveau contre la nature⁵⁶

Nyctor however prefers to remain alone, mistrusting Mavise and woman-kind to the point of comparing her to the insensibility of a machine. Even after Mavise expresses her faith in Nyctor's powers, the poet cannot grant her even her own title of "l'épouse [de] l'humanité"⁵⁷

O femme ô femme plus mécanique
 Plus mécanique que les machines
 L'âme des canons est plus sensible
 Que l'âme de la femme il ne crie
 En elle que l'instinct de l'espèce⁵⁸

Ansaldin de Roulpe finds le Solitaire and brings him to Mavise and Nyctor in Scene Five. Le Solitaire advises them to leave the island before the volcano, "le maître de cette île,"⁵⁹ kills them all.

The sixth scene is representational⁶⁰ the purpose of which is to allow le Solitaire to explain his plight and desires. His exile was ordered ten years ago for an unnamed crime. He escaped from the boat on which he was being taken, but in so doing he chose his own place of punishment - a deserted island where he has seen no one for ten years. He is fatalistic about his situation declaring that he must pay for his crimes:

J'ai voulu choisir le châtement
 Et non l'éviter Adieu fuyez
 Adieu je ne suis qu'un criminel⁶¹

But when Ansaldin and Van Diemen tell him all countries are ravaged by war, le Solitaire sees a chance to redeem himself through the glorification of dying bravely in the war. He feels this is the only way he can find peace:

O joie on peut donc verser son sang
 On peut mourir honorablement
 On peut mourir glorieusement
 Emmenez-moi aux pays sanglants
 Je mourrai pour ceux que j'ai trahis
 Je réparerai enfin mon crime⁶²

And as Madame Giraume saw Van Diemen, Ansaldin, and Nyctor as her liberators, so does le Solitaire regard them as "juges descendus du ciel dans l'île,"⁶³ who have come to absolve him of his crime.

Through taking part in the war, he hopes to procure the right to die:

Et suis-je un homme comme les autres
 Un homme ayant le droit de mourir
 En poussant le cri de la bravoure
 Un homme dont le sang peut couler
 Comme un fleuve où je me laverai⁶⁴

He decides to accompany them with the encouragement of Van Diemen who assures him:

Qui nous vous jugeons et votre crime
 Est remis mais venez avec nous
 Quand nous aurons trouvé le pays
 Où gît cette paix que nous cherchons
 Nous vous ramènerons aux pays
 Où le sang coule⁶⁵

The act closes with Nyctor's repeated premonition that they are being lured into a trap of death. As they leave the island, the volcano erupts and Nyctor sees in it a symbol of nature as their enemy:

Ah voyez le volcan jette des flammes
 La lave jaillit c'est la nature
 Qui se déclare notre ennemie

 Voyez donc comme est terrible
 Cette paix que nous cherchons en vain⁶⁶

Several issues have been raised in Act Two. The theme which seems to dominate is the relationship of each character vis-à-vis Peace. The definition of Peace for each one of them is different. Apollinaire

is pointing out the inherent ambiguity of the word as he did with others in Les Mamelles de Tirésias.

The first scene of Act Three again takes place between heaven and earth. As Ansaldin takes the airplane very high in order to avoid the storm clouds gathering around them, the sun becomes blinding. Mavise sees human and monstrous forms in the clouds (reminiscent of Baudelaire's "merveilleuses constructions de l'impalpable"⁶⁷) which Nyctor compares to gods who have come out of their earthly temples together for the first time, striving towards the perfection of the sun. The sun becomes the symbol of universal Peace:

Les dieux oui tous les dieux de notre humanité
 Qui s'assemblent ici et c'est sans aucun doute
 Bien la première fois que cela leur arrive
 Les dieux de bois de pierre et d'or les dieux subtils
 Et ceux de la pensée viennent vers le soleil

 Tous les temples se sont ouverts et tous les dieux
 Sont venus de partout pour parler au soleil
 Tous sont bons même ceux qui aiment les victimes
 Ils ont toujours voulu la paix de leurs croyants⁶⁸

Nyctor then names the gods who have come together. They include dieties from every religion and culture: Melquarth, Baal, Lilith, Apollo, Jehovah, gods from the Babylonian, Greek, Christian, Gallic, and Nordic faiths as well as many others. It is only through the unanimous effort of all men together that humanity can be saved from self-destruction. The assembled gods realize this:

Tous les dieux assemblés pleurent de voir les hommes
 S'entretuer sous le soleil qui pleure aussi⁶⁹

The idea of unanimity expressed in this passage was not new. Over ten years earlier, Jules Romains, in his philosophy of "unanisme" had professed the same need for man to be reunited with man. For

Apollinaire, the theory of "unanisme" did not become important until after 1916, the year of his injury. Previously he had viewed each man as an individual whose relation to the rest of humanity was relatively unimportant. After he left the front, however, (and probably as a result of his injury), Apollinaire's faith in the individual waned as he became increasingly aware of man's role in the collectivity of human beings. In Couleur du Temps, Mavise is Apollinaire's mouthpiece for this philosophy:

. . . ces grandes paroles désignent
Des êtres véritables Patrie
Nationalités ou bien races
Dont nous sommes une particule
Que dire d'un globule du sang
D'une simple cellule du corps
Que se refuserait à remplir
Sa fonction⁷⁰

In the second scene the characters are at the South Pole. The change from an atmosphere of optimism and hope to one of despair and gloom is manifested in all the characters except Ansaldin. The dreams of finding their Ideal disappear with the first sight of "la blancheur souveraine qui brille."⁷¹ The cold is equated with firstly a horrible, ironic peace:

Partout est l'image de la paix
Implacablement froide la paix⁷²

and secondly with death. Madame Giraume is the first to put the realization into words: "la profonde et l'éternelle mort."⁷³ Ansaldin's spirits remain high as he promises to organise lodging, food and heat: "et je tirerai tout de la glace."⁷⁴ However, all faith in him has been lost and Nyctor even suggests that Ansaldin has gone mad. The only consolation they have, says Nyctor bitterly, is that their bodies are at least assured of physical eternity:

Nous aurons la consolation
 De ne point tomber en pourriture
 Dans des siècles nous serons intacts
 Comme si nous dormions car la mort
 Ce n'est pas la putréfaction
 Dans ce lieu merveilleux de la paix
 Mais seulement un sommeil sans fin⁷⁵

In the third scene, while the other characters have gone to explore their domain, Mavise reproaches Nyctor for having instilled in them a mistrust of Ansaldin:

La folie a fait de grandes choses
 Le doute est toujours cause de la mort⁷⁶

But Nyctor is completely enveloped in his fatalistic notions of their imminent deaths, adopting a masochistic martyr position - a role in which Apollinaire often saw himself. Indeed, the cold, deathly beauty of the environment inspires Nyctor:

O nuit ô splendide nuit ou rampant
 Les célestes bêtes de phosphore
 Belles musiques agonisant
 Dans la rondeur de l'immensité
 Je jouis pleinement de la paix
 De ses splendeurs et de ses blancheurs
 De l'éternité qui les fit naître
 Ne les verra jamais mourir⁷⁷

He repeats his idea of the preceding scene of physical eternity:

C'est je crois
 Une promesse d'éternité
 Que mourir dans cette froide paix⁷⁸

Nyctor is the first to discover the body of the woman encased in ice. For him she is a poetic Ideal, a muse more beautiful than any imagined by poets, including Eve, Eurydice, Helen and Cleopatra. Nyctor imagines her as the creation of his own mind:

C'est moi qui t'avais imaginée
 C'est moi qui t'ai enfin inventée
 Je t'ai créée fille de mes rêves
 Je t'adore ma création⁷⁹

The idea that artists create things in their own image was not new in Apollinaire's works. He said it first in Les Peintres Cubistes:
 "chaque divinité crée à son image."⁸⁰

In Scene Five Ansaldin discovers the woman and claims her for himself. She is the symbol of the marvels of science and Ansaldin intends to make himself famous by building a museum for her in Europe. He feels it is his task to preserve her beauty:

. . . elle n'est qu'à moi seul
 Puisque seul je puis la conserver
 Je suis seul à pouvoir assurer
 La perpétuité de sa beauté⁸¹

Van Diemen claims ownership of the woman in the next scene by virtue of his wealth which financed their trip. In Scene Seven le Solitaire stakes his claim on her because he saved them from the volcano and because he has been alone for so long:

Laissez cette femme solitaire
 Au solitaire que j'étais⁸²

He proposes the only solution:

Puisque vous le voulez ce sera
 Pour elle que nous nous battons⁸³

In the last scene the four men battle to the death amidst the mournful and ironic comments of the women contrasting their soldier's sacrificial death for the Ideal of life with the fruitless search for the Ideal of peace:

Mavise:

Voilà cette paix si blanche et belle
 Si immobile et si morte enfin
 La voilà cette paix homicide
 Pour laquelle les hommes se battent
 Et pour laquelle les hommes meurent⁸⁴

Madame Giraume:

O mon fils je t'avais oublié
 Tu mourus en faveur de la vie
 Nous mourons d'une paix qui ressemble à la mort⁸⁵

The nihilistic ending of the play is, of course, expected. The fatalistic prophecies of Nyctor, in keeping with Apollinaire's thoughts on the poet as prophet, do come true. The last line sardonically underlines the pessimism of the play with "Adieu Adieu il faut que tout meure."⁸⁶

The key to the dramatic action of Couleur du Temps lies in this fatalistic conclusion and also in Nyctor's long speech at the beginning of Act Three. In that speech he calls for all of humanity to take example from the gods who, realizing the danger inherent in separating religions (and thus man), congregate to appeal to man to save himself:

Tous les dieux assemblés pleurent de voir les hommes
 S'entretuer sous le soleil qui pleure aussi⁸⁷

If man kills himself, then the gods die with him. If religion is dead, the world is dead. This reversal of Nietzschean philosophy (predominant in Apollinaire's pre-war and war poetry) is representative of a new lack of faith in man. Even Nyctor, the poet, although he has not lost his clairvoyance, no longer has the unique power to save man.

In Couleur du Temps Apollinaire appeals for the convergence of all forms and aspects of humanity including symbolically, Ansaldin (representing progress and science), Van Diemen (representing wealth and wisdom of the past), Nyctor (philosophy and art), Mavise and Madame Giraume (representing motherhood and love), and le Solitaire

(that part of mankind not included in the above). Part of this is the playwright's original trinity of History, Science and Philosophy which reappear in his work in different forms. His concern for art catching up with the sciences is now translated into an almost desperate appeal for their merger. The impossibility of this ever occurring is the thesis of Couleur du Temps. The characters are unable to co-operate and thus cannot attain any kind of Peace. Only through man's universal acceptance of man can humanity hope to achieve this Ideal. This is why Nyctor advocates a return to their country where, even though it is ravaged by war, one can be a part of a universal collectivity striving for one goal. Of the other characters only Mavise and Madame Giraume show any cognizance of the plight of man. Le Solitaire, even though he wants to die for his country, remains exactly what his title indicates - alone. He seeks personal glory and redemption having no thought for the unanimity of man. Ansaldin de Roulpe remains faithful to Science until the end; Van Diemen is unable to view the frozen woman as anything but a means of fulfilling his own quest for a selfish personal satisfaction.

The title Couleur du Temps is significant and provides a clue to the unifying principle of the play. The "colour of time"⁸⁸ indicates that Apollinaire is expounding his philosophy on the present state of man. The plot magnitude is that of more than one character in a series of situations centred around the principle event - the decision to leave the homeland in search of Peace. In this sense, Couleur du Temps is similar to the classical tragedies of Corneille and Racine. The line of action is divergent since the initial de-

cision by the three men to leave is further complicated by le Solitaire and the women, and the discovery of the figure in ice. Suspense is not involved because of the continual hints and prophecies of the dénouement.

Couleur du Temps, then, is a didactic play whose thesis is the impossibility of attaining an Ideal without the unanimous co-operation of men. In that each of the characters is representative of a particular portion of society, the plot is deductive. From the characters-symbols, the spectator is expected to apply the principles of "unanisme" to himself.

Here one can clearly discern the proximity of Apollinaire to the Symbolists whose searches for an Ideal often ended in disillusionment or ambiguity. In fact, the third act of Couleur du Temps is more than just slightly similar to the last part of Gide's Voyage d'Urien written in 1893. This latter work, often considered semi-autobiographical, is a "pilgrim's progress" quest for an Ideal. In the last part of the tale, entitled "Voyage vers une mer glaciale," the travellers (reduced in number by various perils and diseases to the magical seven) struggle to reach Purity symbolized by the stark whiteness of the North Pole. Their battle is a perilous one as they must overcome even the despair of a corpse frozen in ice, holding a blank piece of paper. The corpse at first was a symbol of hope to them, as was the woman in Couleur du Temps, but it changes to an incarnation of hopelessness. The travellers find strength in companionship, however, and finally achieve solidarity, symbolized by the discovery of a perfectly circular, unfrozen lake. The "we" of the final lines changing to "I"

is the symbol of the unanimity found in co-operation between the individuals. The voyage in search of identity has succeeded:

Et nous étant encore agenouillés, nous avons
cherché sur l'eau noire le reflet du ciel que
Je rêve.⁸⁹

This, in effect, is what Apollinaire pursues in Couleur du Temps. However, his characters did not succeed in finding their circle refusing to co-operate with one another. But Le Voyage d'Urien proper is followed by a short poem in which Gide apologizes for having tricked his reader. Admitting that the story was in fact nothing but a dream, he introduces a note of uncertainty and disillusionment. The Symbolist Ideal cannot be reached except in dreams.⁹⁰

Another Symbolist work, a prose poem by Rimbaud entitled "Being Beauteous," expresses the same lack of faith in the attainability of an unmitigated purity. The imagery is similar to that of Couleur du Temps and Le Voyage d'Urien: pure white snow, "un Etre de beauté"⁹¹ frozen in front of an iceberg, and the feeling of a cold but beautiful death surround them. The "nous" of the poem are hypnotized by the strange beauty of the figure: "nos os sont revetus d'un nouveau corps amoureux"⁹² and yet they cannot escape the death-like atmosphere of the cold around them.

Apollinaire was not, of course, the only author to express Symbolist ideas in the theatre. The willingness to accept life and man in their actual forms was the primary esthetic premise of Maurice Maeterlinck. In spite of all their journeys into fantasy, the boy and girl of L'Oiseau Bleu finally come to the realisation that their dreams and fantasies are merely extensions of their own

lives. The magic blue bird belongs to their next door neighbour and the moral is essentially that "il faut cultiver notre jardin." Translated into Apollinaire terms, happiness is in remaining in one's own country.

There are four major characters in Couleur du Temps: Nyctor, Van Diemen, Ansaldin de Roulpe and le Solitaire. Each of them has a similar function in the plot; that is, they each represent an aspect of the thesis of the play to varying degrees.

Nyctor, the poet, is symbolic of art and philosophy, the third element in the Apollinairian trinity. Throughout the play he is the "ideal poet" in the terms of Apollinaire himself, as explicated in Chapter Four. He believes himself to be the divine creator and is continually making references to his prophetic abilities, such as:

Car il est l'avenir ce poète
C'est-à-dire la crainte joyeuse
Moins que la mort et plus que la vie
L'avenir enfin ou le désir
La beauté même ou la vérité⁹³

And Nyctor in fact does predict the outcome of their search:

[. . .] un pressentiment me dit
Qu'en partant nous allons à la mort⁹⁴

The function of a poet, as Nyctor sees it, is to express in words what other people can only sense or intuit as sublime:

[. . .] exprimer
Tout ce que les autres citoyens
Peuvent ressentir de sublime⁹⁵

A poet's duty is to remain faithful to his country because he is "l'âme de la patrie."⁹⁶ Apollinaire emphasized this same essentially ethnic difference between the arts of various countries in "L'Esprit

Nouveau et les Poètes"⁹⁷:

L'art ne cessera d'être national que le jour
où l'univers entier vivant sous un même
climat dans des demeures bâties sur le même
modèle, parlera la même langue avec le même
accent, c'est-à-dire jamais. Des différences
ethniques et nationales naît la variété qu'il
faut sauvegarder.⁹⁸

Even Nyctor's name shows to what extent Apollinaire had himself in mind when he created the character. Nyctor appeared in many of Apollinaire's original manuscripts, most notably in the autobiographical, Le Poète Assassiné. He was always a clairvoyant, mystical person, the kind with which the author identified. The name itself was deleted from the published version of Le Poète Assassiné; however, Margaret Davies, quoting from the original manuscript, explains the origin of the name:

At the lycée in Marseilles, in spite of the environment, in spite of the sea air, I became sad, dreamy, preoccupied. As I did not need much sleep, and often got up at night to go for a walk or to meditate at my window, my friends called me Nyctor, and I have chosen to keep my nocturnal name.⁹⁹

But the final fate of Nyctor in Couleur du Temps belies Apollinaire's original faith in himself and in poets. Nyctor is caught up in the same unsolvable dilemma of Ansaldin, Van Diemen and le Solitaire. All he wants is sole possession of the woman in ice - a materialistic selfishness to which Apollinaire had never before subscribed. In this sense Nyctor is a major character. Clairvoyant and prophetic as he is, he nevertheless cannot share or live peacefully with the others.

Van Diemen represents History in the Bate's trinity and as such he feels he is the backbone of the entire operation:

[. . .] c'est moi qui suis venu ici
 Et vous ne m'avez suivi que grâce
 A la bonté que j'eus de vous prendre
 Avec moi est-ce vrai Répondez
 Sans moi vous seriez restés là-bas¹⁰⁰

His faith in materialism, unlike that of Nyctor, is manifested from the beginning. In the first scene he momentarily regrets leaving his country because:

C'est ici que j'ai vécu aimé
 Et que je me suis enrichi¹⁰¹

It is Van Diemen who advocates the return to Gemeinschaft, to the close communal type of living in which he grew up:

L'homme n'était plus rien c'est pourquoi nous fuyons
 Pour retrouver un peu de liberté humaine¹⁰²

His hope for "liberté humaine" is, however, tragically and ironically fulfilled. Van Diemen is unable to forego his liberty to save his companions; he too wants the frozen figure for himself alone.

The origin of his name, although not as significant as Nyctor's with relation to Apollinaire's life, is worthy of mention. In the seventeenth century, there lived an Antoine Van Diemen, a Dutch admiral and governor. After spending much of his life as a successful merchant in Holland, he joined the navy, began to explore the South Pacific, and was credited for the discovery of Tasmania (originally Van Diemen's Land). Of his personality the Grand Larousse du dix-neuvième siècle says "[il avait] la réputation d'un administrateur aussi habile qu'intègre."¹⁰³ The parallels between Apollinaire's Van Diemen and the original are evident.

Dramatically speaking, Van Diemen is a weak character although a major one in terms of his function in the play. In relation to the symmetry required by the History-Science-Philosophy trinity, he may be considered equally important but compared to Ansaldin or Nyctor his role remains incomplete. As a character he is too small for the part required of him. For example, the only scene in which he expresses his own ideas and does not merely react to the thoughts and actions of the other characters is at the beginning of Act Two when he declares his desire to "retrouver un peu de liberté humaine."¹⁰⁴ However, besides this and other very few isolated moments, Van Diemen remains a reactionary character. The audience may be bored by him because of the lack of ambiguity regarding his personality or his actions; in other words, his character is delineated with complete rather than incomplete signs.

For Ansaldin de Roulpe, a much more effective personage, the voyage is a testimonial for the success of science:

Mon nouveau moteur fera merveilles
 Nous avons de quoi faire fois
 Le tour du monde aérien¹⁰⁵

His faith in science is carried to such an extreme that by leaving their country to pioneer a new existence they are comparable to the first Christians:

Du sang il naît un ordre nouveau
 Il naît un Etat un grand Etat
 La nation de ceux qui ne veulent
 Plus de mots souverains plus de gloire
 Et comme les premiers chrétiens
 Ils sont tous prêts dans la douleur
 Prêtes à devenir universels
 Le Christ acquit aux hommes

Leurs droits spirituels
 Et la France inventa
 Leurs droits philosophiques
 Dans cette île déserte
 Proclamons donc enfin
 Leurs droits physiques et politiques¹⁰⁶

Peace for Ansaldin consists of controlling the universe by means of science. Men are beneath the powers of science and consequently, a new religion governed by progress is born:

Il naît une catholicité
 Fondée seulement sur la science
 Et sur l'intérêt immédiat
 Des hommes ne serait-il pas juste
 Dites-moi que leur tranquillité
 Allât de pair avec les progrès
 De l'industrie¹⁰⁷

Apollinaire, of course, had always longed for amalgamation of science with art. However, in Couleur du Temps he demonstrates the impossibility of such a merger. It is Ansaldin's blind and undying loyalty to the new catholicism of science that creates a false sense of security among the other characters. They believe in Ansaldin's ability to lead them to a country of peace and wealth where they can live together prosperously. However, after they realize the hopelessness and the despair of their situation at the South Pole, they turn against Ansaldin, accusing him of madness. The scientist remains faithful to his beliefs, impervious to his companions' accusations:

J'organiserai tout sagement
 Logis chauffage éclairage tout
 Et je tirerai tout de la glace¹⁰⁸

Ansaldin functions very strongly in the plot. As representative of science, he remains consistent to his purpose from the beginning to end, the most of all the personages. The hopelessness of

the situation is thus reflected most noticeably in him. "Je meurs satisfait que j'ai tout connu,"¹⁰⁹ he says at the end ironically emphasizing the limitations of his scientific knowledge.

Le Solitaire is a surprise element, not being introduced until the second half of the play. In one sense he is nothing more than a stretching device but because Apollinaire has given him an equally important function in the plot, he must be considered a major character. Le Solitaire is unable to adapt to living with other people. Interested only in his own glory and redemption, he cannot give up his solitude to communicate with the others. For him, Peace consists of being:

. . . un homme comme les autres
Un homme ayant le droit de mourir
En poussant le cri de la bravoure¹¹⁰

He too becomes trapped in the web of materialism with the other three men, aspiring only to own the woman in ice.

Both Mavise and Madame Giraume are representational characters. They serve as sounding boards for the other personages in the play and are mouthpieces for all women. In this way they round out the plot and make the intellectual ideas more probable.

Madame Giraume, as the image of the subservient woman and motherhood, allows herself to be influenced by the men. In Scene Three of the first act, on the battlefield, she bemoans the loss of her son and all the other soldiers who have died in the war. She is a reflection of the effects of war on motherhood. The loss of her son means a loss of her will:

Puisque je ne verrai plus mon fils
Emmenez-moi donc où vous voudrez¹¹¹

Ironically, because of her subservience and willingness to follow someone else's ideas rather than her own, she is left completely alone at the end of the play. She and Mavise, to whom a communal life was so vital, are left in solitude. Madame Giraume sums up the paradoxical situation:

O mon fils je t'avais oublié
Tu mourus en faveur de la vie
Nous mourons d'une paix qui ressemble à la mort¹¹²

Mavise is the personification of the new "liberated" generation of women of the early twentieth century. After the death of her fiancé, she feels a certain kind of patriotism; her duty is to remain with her country as part of an enormous collectivity of which she is just a particle:

Mais [les] grandes paroles désignent
Des êtres véritables Patries
Nationalités ou bien races
Dont nous sommes un particule
Que dire d'un globule du sang
D'une simple cellule du corps
Qui se refuserait de remplir
Sa fonction¹¹³

Thus Mavise realizes the necessity of an "unanisme" from the beginning as does Nyctor. Her attitudes do not change, however, and together with Madame Giraume, she bitterly points out the thesis of the play:

Voilà cette paix si blanche et belle
Si immobile et si morte enfin
La voilà cette paix homicide
Pour laquelle les hommes se battent
Et pour laquelle les hommes meurent.¹¹⁴

The chorus, although heard only four times in the play, has a very important function. Apollinaire has used it in much the same

way as did the Greeks. The Greek chorus, originally representing the collective conscience of the community, had a moralizing, all-enveloping function which influenced the spectators' viewpoint profoundly. It passed judgement on the action of the play. In Couleur du Temps the chorus is split into two factions, one representing "Les Voix des Morts et des Vivants" who speaks three times, and the other "Les Voix des Dieux" who speaks once, at the end of Nyctor's monologue in Act Two, Scene One. In that speech, as noted earlier, Nyctor appeals to man to solve his problems collectively. If the two sections of the chorus are considered in their ensemble, it is evident that they represent in fact the conscience of a pessimistic Apollinaire. Encompassing the living, the dead, and the gods, the chorus represents the moralizing force of the author. The moral that it projects is the inescapable leitmotiv of the entire play: "Adieu Adieu il faut que tout meure."

Considered as a whole, it is understandable why Couleur du Temps failed as a production. The characters are too obviously vehicles for Apollinaire's thought and are contrived to function in a very pedantic plot. Many of the speeches are too long and repetitive to hold the interest of the audience and they are, in several instances, nothing more than stretching devices. The chorus, although functionally secure in the structure is not used often enough to make it effective. Generally speaking, there is not enough ambiguity or doubt concerning the incidents in the plot and the playwright runs the risk of boring the audience.

But all these faults are ones which could easily have been

corrected had Apollinaire been in charge of the production. The uniqueness of the mise-en-scène (that is, the actors dangling from the ceiling), incongruous with the profound lines of the play, could have been very effective if the poet had introduced a little of his characteristic humour at the right time. Michel Décaudin notes, by the way, that Apollinaire had asked Vlamincx to provide the décor, but that the Compagnie Art et Liberté did not take the advice.¹¹⁵ One can detect Apollinaire's surrealist tendencies in this mise-en-scène and also in his treatment of time and space. One is rarely aware of the passage of time in Couleur du Temps and references made to night or day are infrequent. The length of the journeys is not emphasized, and the scenes change rapidly with little or no explanation.

What Apollinaire has written is a dramatic poem, and not really a play. Consequently, the main reason for its failure is not that it is not dramatic but that it lacks theatricality. The representation of the play would add nothing that is not evident from a reading of it. In fact, considering the incongruities noted above, the production might even detract from the overall impact. Couleur du Temps should be left, as Pierre Albert-Birot said, "dans la paix du livre."¹¹⁶

NOTES

¹Davies, op. cit., p. 303.

²Grossvogel, op. cit., p. 32.

³Bettina Knapp, Introduction to Les Mamelles de Tirésias, in Guicharnaud's Anthology of 20th Century French Theatre, (Paris and New York, 1967), p. 40.

⁴Davies, op. cit., p. 303.

⁵Adéma, op. cit., p. 239.

⁶Albert-Birot, "Couleur du Temps," SIC, III, no. 36 (décembre no. 2, 1918), n.p.

⁷Ibid., loc. cit.

⁸Apollinaire became ill at about the same time as the rehearsals for Couleur du Temps began. However, Marcel Adéma intimates that during his illness, the poet thought "sans cesse à sa pièce Couleur du Temps." (Adéma, Guillaume Apollinaire, p. 341.) His untimely death did not prevent the production from taking place. Some controversy arose concerning the appropriateness of staging the play so soon after Apollinaire's death. Picasso and Albert-Birot both tried to convince Madame

Apollinaire to oppose the production. However others such as André Breton and Paul Guillaume had opinions to the contrary and the play went on.

⁹Albert-Birot, op. cit., loc. cit.

¹⁰Ibid., loc. cit.

¹¹Ibid., loc. cit.

¹²Shattuck, op. cit., p. 292.

¹³Adéma, op. cit., pp. 239-240.

¹⁴He never fully recovered from the injury, having to wear a bandage around his head constantly. The original operation was delayed which may have caused the need for many subsequent operations and long sojourns in the hospital.

¹⁵Adéma, op. cit., loc. cit.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 240.

¹⁷Albert-Birot, op. cit., loc. cit.

¹⁸Ibid., loc. cit.

¹⁹Ibid., loc. cit.

²⁰Davies, op. cit., loc. cit.

²¹Knapp, op. cit., loc. cit.

²²O.C., Vol. 3, p. 686.

²³Ibid., p. 696.

²⁴Ibid., p. 653.

²⁵Ibid., p. 654.

²⁶Ibid., p. 655.

²⁷Ibid., loc. cit.

²⁸Ibid., loc. cit.

²⁹Ibid., p. 356.

This idea of the poet's art being his homeland was repeated elsewhere in Apollinaire's works. He felt not only that your homeland is what you create or what you do but conversely, that feelings for one's homeland can inspire art: "Quoi de plus beau du reste que de chanter les héros et la grandeur de la patrie. Quoi de plus beau que d'inspirer de nobles sentiments aux générations à venir, quoi de plus noble qu'en rappelant les expériences de la guerre forcer les gouvernants à ne jamais oublier que nous devons être forts si nous voulons exercer librement les arts de la paix et nous élever dans

ces arts." (Interview with Albert-Birot, SIC, in O.C., Vol. 3, p. 937.)

³⁰Ibid., loc. cit.

³¹Ibid., p. 658.

³²Ibid., loc. cit.

³³Ibid., loc. cit.

³⁴Ibid., p. 659.

³⁵Ibid., loc. cit.

³⁶Ibid., p. 660.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 662-663.

³⁸Ibid., p. 662.

³⁹Ibid., pp. 663-664.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 664.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 666.

⁴²Ibid., loc. cit.

⁴³Ibid., p. 668.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 669.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 669.

Paul Ginestier in his book entitled Le Poète et la Machine has developed thoroughly this idea of the alienation of man from his machines. He compares this alienation (which he sees as a punishment) to the alienation that ancient man felt with the unknown powers which controlled his destiny. However, the difference between modern man and his ancestors lies in the power of the machine: "si l'homme antique et l'homme moderne se sentent tous deux jouets d'un pouvoir extérieur à eux-mêmes, l'homme moderne a en outre, le sentiment d'avoir créé le pouvoir, d'être physiquement capable de s'en débarrasser, mais de ne pas avoir la force morale de la faire." (Ginestier, p. 37.)

⁴⁶This term, roughly translated as "community", was opposed to Gesellschaft ("society") by Ferdinand Tönnies in his Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft, trans. and ed. Charles P. Loomis, New York: Harper and Row, 1965. In its simplest terms Gemeinschaft refers to "all intimate, private, and exclusive living together." (p. 33).

⁴⁷O.C., Vol. 3, pp. 668-669.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 670.

⁴⁹Ibid., loc. cit.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 671.

⁵¹Ibid., loc. cit.

⁵²Ibid., loc. cit.

⁵³"Les Tendances Nouvelles," SIC, VIII, nos. 8-9-10, (août, septembre, octobre, 1916), n.p.

⁵⁴O.C., Vol. 3, p. 674.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 675.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 676.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 675.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 676-677.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 678.

⁶⁰A representational scene is one which is extraneous to the plot but facilitates either the movement of the action on stage or the presentation of ideas.

⁶¹O.C., Vol. 3, p. 680.

⁶²Ibid., p. 681.

⁶³Ibid., loc. cit.

⁶⁴Ibid., loc. cit.

⁶⁵Ibid., loc. cit.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 682.

⁶⁷Baudelaire, "La Soupe et les Nuages," Oeuvres Complètes,
(Paris, 1961), p. 298.

⁶⁸O.C., Vol. 3, p. 683.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 689.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 672.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 688.

⁷²Ibid., p. 686.

⁷³Ibid., p. 686.

⁷⁴Ibid., loc. cit.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 688.

⁷⁶Ibid., loc. cit.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 689.

⁷⁸Ibid., loc. cit.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 690.

⁸⁰O.C., Vol. 4, p. 17.

⁸¹O.C., Vol. 3, p. 691.

⁸²Ibid., p. 694.

⁸³Ibid., loc. cit.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 696.

⁸⁵Ibid., loc. cit.

⁸⁶Ibid., loc. cit.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 684.

⁸⁸Generally, however, "temps" is translated as "weather".

⁸⁹Gide, Le Voyage d'Urien, (Paris, 1929), p. 160.

⁹⁰That Apollinaire knew Le Voyage d'Urien and was influenced by Gide cannot be doubted. He was a friend of Gide and, judging from a letter from Apollinaire to Gide in 1911, they were in the habit of

criticizing one another's works. In that letter, Apollinaire approves of Gide's Isabelle and Nouveaux Prétexes, although he disagrees strongly with Gide's opinions of Charles Péguy in whom Apollinaire only sees "de la banalité, [. . .] de la platitude." (O.C., Vol. 4, p. 751.)

⁹¹Rimbaud, "Being Beauteous," Poésies, (Paris, 1960), p. 139.

⁹²Ibid., loc. cit.

⁹³O.C., Vol. 3, p. 657.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 655.

⁹⁵Ibid., loc. cit.

⁹⁶Ibid., loc. cit.

⁹⁷It is difficult to say which of the two works was written first. Couleur du Temps was ready for rehearsal shortly before Apollinaire's death and "L'Esprit Nouveau et les Poètes" was published a month later.

⁹⁸O.C., Vol. 3, p. 903.

⁹⁹Davies, op. cit., p. 26.

This quotation was unavailable in French although Michel Décaudin mentions the passage in his Notes to Le Poète Assassiné

(O.C., p. 726). Another possible origin for the name Nyctor can be found in the works of Lucian, a Greek satirist and philosopher of the second century A. D. In his Alethes historia (True History), a tall tale recounting voyages on the sea, in the air, in the belly of a whale, there is a certain Nyctor who is a god on the moon. The Encyclopedia Britannica [Vol. 14, p. 396] suggests that this work inspired Jonathon Swift's Gulliver's Travels as well as many of Rabelais' tales. Although it cannot be proved that Apollinaire knew this work of Lucian, it can nevertheless be considered very probable given the variety of knowledge of the poet and the proximity of subject matter in Couleur du Temps and the Alethes historia.

¹⁰⁰O.C., Vol. 3, p. 693.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 653.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 669.

¹⁰³Grand Larousse du dix-neuvième siècle, VI, p. 781.

¹⁰⁴O.C., Vol. 3, p. 669.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 657.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 672.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 673.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 686.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 695.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 681.

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 664.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 696.

¹¹³Ibid., p. 672.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 696.

¹¹⁵Décaudin, "Couleur du Temps," O.C., Vol. 3, p. 927.

¹¹⁶"Couleur du Temps," SIC, III, no. 36, (décembre no. 2, 1918),

n.p.

CHAPTER VIII

CASANOVA

"La commedia dell'arte, c'est une
conception plastique du théâtre.

Elle subordonne tout au spectacle. Ce qui signifie qu'elle n'est pas seulement anti-réaliste, mais d'abord [. . .] anti-intellectuelle."¹

[Gustave Attlinger]

If Couleur du Temps was totally different in form and ideas from Les Mamelles de Tirésias, Casanova demonstrates yet another feature of Apollinaire's multi-faceted imagination. The gravity of Couleur du Temps gives way to a brilliant spontaneity in keeping with the poet's formerly optimistic and genial disposition, and the theatricality which was lacking in his second play now reappears in abundance, reminiscent of Les Mamelles de Tirésias.

Casanova has never been produced and, as with Couleur du Temps, it was never revised by the playwright. In fact, his illness and death followed so soon after the completion of the first draft, that it was not until three years later that Madame Apollinaire extracted the manuscript from her files. At that time, Pierre Lalo, the music critic for Le Temps, proposed the production of Casanova to Albert Carré, then director of the Opéra-Comique. It was not until another three years had passed that the Opéra-Comique, which had changed directors, finally reviewed the manuscript. The play was refused on the grounds that it was "dénué de fantaisie et d'habileté" and Apollinaire was "manquant d'expérience."² Thus the problem of judging the theatrical merits of a play on the basis of an unedited script remains; as was evident with Couleur du Temps this is unfair to the playwright who was in the habit of reviewing and revising his manuscripts.

Apollinaire's reasons for writing such a play as Casanova date from 1910 and the publication of Le Théâtre Italien. The Italian theatre in general and the "sacre rappresentazioni" and the "opera-buffa" in particular had always appealed to the poet. From the "sacre rappresentazioni" Apollinaire borrowed the spirit of "divertis-

sement"³ which he felt was the principle reason for their enormous popularity. Included in this spirit was "de la bouffonerie" and a "mise en scène [. . .] naïve, mais aussi somptueuse que possible."⁴ The productions also lacked any deep psychological development⁵ an essential but not detrimental element to Casanova. From the "opera-buffa" of the Théâtres de la Foire (ie. Saint-Germain, Saint-Ovide, and Saint-Laurent), Apollinaire inherited a burlesque style which "conquirent au XVIII^e siècle le public aussi bien populaire qu'aristocratique."⁶ This ability to please both the peasants and the aristocracy was a trait which the playwright valued highly. Robert Mallet even suggests that Apollinaire was attempting to duplicate the style of Les Fêtes Parisiennes, a play by Chevrier given at the Foire Saint-Germain in 1712, which itself was a parody of Les Fêtes vénitiennes "avec 'duos, airs et chorégraphies', tout comme dans Casanova."⁷

In March of 1918 Apollinaire was given an opportunity to quench his thirst for writing a comic opera. Henry Defosse, the orchestra director of the Ballets Russes, intimated to Apollinaire his wish to compose music for an opera after the Italian style and asked the poet to write the libretto. According to Marcel Adéma, Apollinaire had already sketched out a version of Casanova sometime between 1910 and 1918 and had ruminated the possibility of having it set to music.⁸ He therefore readily accepted Defosse's proposal. By August 5, 1918 he had completed the three acts, modifying very slightly his original manuscript. Two and a half weeks later the music for the first act was finished. As Defosse was to spend some time in London with the Ballets Russes, Apollinaire sent the script with him. The

poet's death prevented his ever hearing the final version.

Besides these relatively coincidental reasons are more profound, or at least more personal, motives for writing this type of play. Since 1916 and his injury, Apollinaire had descended deeper and deeper into a depression which, at the time of Le Poète Assassiné or Couleur du Temps, seemed insurmountable. One might even date this pessimism as far back as 1911 when the poet was falsely accused and subsequently imprisoned for the theft of the "Mona Lisa" from the Louvre. A poem he wrote at the time reveals his feelings:

Avant d'entrer dans ma cellule
Il a fallu me mettre nu
Et quelle voix sinistre ulule
Guillaume qu'es-tu devenu

Le Lazare entrant dans la tombe
Au lieu d'en sortir comme il fit
Adieu adieu chantante ronde
O mes années ô jeunes filles⁹

Margaret Davies, for one, recognized the profound effects the imprisonment had on the poet:

One cannot exaggerate the effect that the whole affair had on him. [. . .] Emotionally it very much increased his sense of insecurity, which the warm camaraderie of the last years had been helping to dissipate. Some of the people whom he had thought of as friends had passed by on the other side; and in his low moments for some time now he would indulge in a sense of martyrdom, even of crucifixion.¹⁰

In all likelihood, the "divertissement" noted above was not really intended for the spectators but for Apollinaire himself trying to rekindle an enjoyment of life which was rapidly dwindling. According to Adéma, Casanova was "destinée dans son esprit à satisfaire

le besoin de gaîté, de délassement, qu'après de si longues années de souffrances et d'angoisses, ne manqueront pas d'éprouver les poilus survivants des tranchées."¹¹ The overall tone of the play did succeed in at least camouflaging if not curing his depression which may, after all, have been his intention.

Moreover, the subject matter of Casanova is true to the Apollinarian spirit, sensitive to colourful and romantic types such as Jacques Casanova. In fact, the framework for the play was borrowed from an incident in the Mémoires de Jacques Casanova.¹² It concerns an encounter between the hero and a certain Bellino of a travelling actors' troupe, whom Casanova suspects of being a girl because " . . . son habit d'homme ne masquait qu'imparfaitement la plus belle gorge." Bellino's real name is Thérèse, an orphan who, because of her training in music and singing, is hired by the troupe.¹³ The story is drawn out over Casanova's many attempts to get Bellino to reveal herself, which, of course, she eventually does.

It does not seem unfounded to speculate that Apollinaire had envisaged a prototype in Casanova, a dream which if never stated openly, was evident from his many attempts to acquire mistresses and wives. His desires and ambitions in that direction ironically pervade all of his works. In "La Chanson du Mal-Aimé" for example he writes:

Moi qui sais des lais pour les reines
 Les complaints de mes années
 Des hymnes d'exclave aux murènes
 La romance du mal-aimé
 Et des chansons pour les sirènes¹⁴

In writing Casanova, Apollinaire was escaping from this omnipresent dissonance in his soul. His Casanova is a vibrant and lively character in contrast to the deteriorating author. Casanova's first lines in the play boast of his nature:

Je suis Casanova
L'amant joyeux et tendre.
Je dis à l'Amour: "va",
Il va sans plus attendre
Cueillir les coeurs des belles.
J'en ai des ribambelles . . .¹⁵

In Casanova one is once again faced with assessing the author's seriousness, as with Les Mamelles de Tirésias. Both Robert Mallet and Marcel Adéma warn the reader against analyzing too deeply a play which, the latter critic asserts, is a "comédie parodique à laquelle il faut laisser son caractère de divertissement sans grande profondeur."¹⁶ Mallet contends also that the playwright never intended to weight the play with deep meaning, and cautions: "il ne faut surtout pas que le lecteur croie y trouver plus d'intentions qu'Apollinaire n'avait voulu en mettre."¹⁷

Nevertheless, even if Apollinaire did not consciously import any significance deeper than the surface gaiety, the personal implications are still present. Apollinaire only used this particular incident from the Mémoires de Jacques Casanova as an outline, adding many more elements that were not present in the original episode. For example even though it is treated lightly in the play, the Lesbian attractions of the women and especially of La Marquise to Bellino are not without significance. As well as Apollinaire's preoccupation with the androgyne, pointed out with relation to Les Mamelles de Tirésias, these attractions also point to the playwright's desire

to reduce the importance of sexual identities. The women may be attracted to Bellino as an aesthetic object of beauty and not necessarily to her sexual attributes.

Apollinaire subtitled the play "comédie parodique" and one of the clues to judging his seriousness lies in the nature of the parody. Outwardly, the play was structured after Italian plays, including the "sacre rappresentazioni," the "commedia dell'arte" and the "opera-buffa." In that sense, the author is parodying the genres themselves, though not with malicious intent. The play is a pastiche of many literary and artistic influences, and as Mallet indicates "le pastiche n'existe pas que dans le thème, l'agencement des scènes et des ballets où l'on voit apparaître un berger qu'on croirait sorti d'un tableau de Watteau."¹⁸ On the other hand, Apollinaire is mocking the character of Casanova himself, the incarnation of infidelity, oscillating between the challenge of Bellino and the availability of Rosinella who is constantly throwing herself at his feet. The parody then is double: not only of form but also of character.

In addition, Apollinaire takes the opportunity to parody a few well-known authors from whom he borrows a few key phrases. In the latter part of Act Three he makes reference to Vigny's "Dieu! que le son du cor est triste au fond des bois!"¹⁹ with the lines:

J'entends le cor qui sonne
Qui sonne au fond des bois!²⁰

Variations of these lines are repeated until the end of the play. These particular lines may also recall the last act of Hernani in which the hero hears the horn of Don Ruy Gomez claiming his life.

The lines which follow may refer to Hernani's pledge to give up his life upon hearing the horn:

Prends mon coeur, je le donne
A qui connaît ma voix.²¹

From Verlaine, Apollinaire borrows the phrase of "Le Colloque Sentimental" - "dans le vieux parc solitaire:"²²

Dans le parc solitaire
Il est sans doute mort!²³

The proximity of themes between "Le Colloque Sentimental" and Casanova is interesting. In Verlaine's work, love is unattainable because the two people in the poem have different ideas on their love:

-- Qu'il était bien, le ciel, et grand, l'espoir!
-- L'espoir a fui, vaincu vers le ciel noir.²⁴

For one, love is an illusion; for the other, love is taken at face value. In Casanova, one is also deceived by the appearance of love for things are not always what they seem.

The first act of Casanova takes place in the square of a small Italian town. There is the traditional stage arrangement of sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century plays - doors leading on and off stage (in this case leading into an inn) and a neutral meeting place in the centre where most of the action takes place. The importance of this type of décor is explained by Gustave Attinger:

Le décor-ensemble de rues et de fenêtres répond
dès l'origine aux nécessités du jeu et de
l'intrigue auxquels il accorde dans un espace
restreint, le maximum de possibilités.²⁵

The "choeur des comédiens" begins the play on a rather melancholy note, emphasizing the theme of time passing, so frequent in Apollinaire's poetry:

Le chariot de Thespis
 Est une douce demeure.
 Le temps passe, c'est tant pis!
 Le temps fond comme du beurre
 Sur le feu terrible dont
 Le petit dieu Cupidon
 Allume pour nous les âmes
 Des spectateurs et ses flammes
 Ne nous brûlent même pas.
 Mais nous allons pas à pas
 Sur les routes de ce monde
 A travers la terre ou l'onde.²⁶

Another chorus, this time the "dames de la ville" introduce Bellino whom they all adore and idolize:

Ah! qu'il est beau ce Bellino
 Viens avec moi, tiens mon anneau.
 Je t'aime, ta beauté m'enivre,
 C'est avec toi que je veux vivre.²⁷

This stanza reappears four more times in the first two scenes and serves to emphasize the effect of Bellino on the women. Bellino, of course, feigns indifference towards the "dames de la ville" and avoids them as much as possible. No other major characters are introduced in this scene although several ornamental personages make an appearance. The first scene establishes a musical rhythm which will be carried on throughout the play. Speeches and lines are repeated and background information about the carnival is supplied.

Once this rhythm is established Casanova and La Marquise are introduced. La Marquise, a former mistress of Casanova, is in love with Bellino and she solicits Casanova's help in winning him. When Casanova sees Bellino, he marvels at his beauty and regrets his promise to La Marquise. When he tells her "mais, Madame, c'est une fille,"²⁸ all the characters on stage take up a refrain which will be repeated each time the hero asserts that Bellino is a female:

Il est fou, des plus fous!
 Il prend le fil pour l'aiguille!
 Il est fou, des plus fous!
 Sauvez-vous, sauvez-vous!²⁹

Act Two consists of a single scene which takes place on "le champ de foire."³⁰ The total effect of the whole act is one of movement, gaiety and in general an atmosphere of a carnival. To one side a charlatan pulls teeth and an astrologer offers his services. On the other side is the portable theatre of the acting troupe, its curtains not yet raised. On both sides of this smaller stage is a sign reading "La Métamorphose Galante", a hint of what will follow. Throughout the act the masked crowd, consisting of "un matamore, un capitain, une arlequine, une colombine, pierrots, pierrettes, apothicaires, médecins, etc. . . ,"³¹ walks back and forth singing. These are all masques from the commedia dell'arte. It is significant that Apollinaire chose not to capitalize the names and to add the indefinite article because the characters are now completely depersonalized and totally theatrical.

The first part of the act consists of nine six-line stanzas sung by the "masques", describing the scene and the atmosphere of the fair. Each of the stanzas is in strict rhythm and rhymed in couplets. Between each are the lines:

Le temps de joie et d'amour
 Est de retour.³²

While they sing, a ballet by the "zingaras" and the "chiromanciennes" takes place in a scene borrowed almost directly from Molière.

La Marquise enters dressed elaborately with a black velvet mask. She approaches the astrologer who promises:

Pour forcer à l'amour, j'envoûte,
On réussit si l'on m'écoute.³³

Meanwhile Casanova appears and laments his "fatale destinée!"³⁴ He has accepted that Bellino is actually a boy and stolidly takes a lesson from the experience.

With the appearance of Rosinella, a gypsy who immediately becomes enamoured with Casanova, the hero decides to forget about Bellino and live only for the moment at hand. Rosinella has more permanent ideas in mind, however, and in two simultaneous speeches, they reveal their natures. For Casanova, the affair will be "aujourd'hui, non pas demain. . . "³⁵ while Rosinella sees in it something more lasting:

. . . les couples des amants
Demeurent toujours charmants.³⁶

La Marquise is annoyed with the astrologer who has told her to give up the chase after Bellino. Bellino passes his head through the curtains of the troupe's stage and the four of them, in identically rhythmic six line stanzas sung simultaneously, give their feelings on the situation. This particular method of simultaneism was also used by Apollinaire in Couleur du Temps and, as the words themselves are indistinguishable, it serves mainly to create an overall effect of rhythm and movement.

All the characters on stage begin to prepare for the production of La Métamorphose Galante: the musicians tune their instruments, a "valet de théâtre", dressed formally, runs across the stage ringing a bell to announce that the play is about to begin, and the audience settles down on the grass to watch the performance. The final lines before the play begins are sung once again by "les

masques" in the same vein as at the beginning of Act Two. They warn Rosinella of the certainty of Casanova's infidelity and touch on Apollinaire's favourite death-of-love theme, discussed in Chapter Four:

Notre soeur, la zingarelle,
Quand s'en ira l'infidèle
Rejoins-nous à nos sabbats!
Nous t'attendrons tous là-bas,
Loin, bien loin des mascarades
Aux lendemains si maussades!
Le temps de joie et d'amour
Meurt à son tour.³⁷

The scene of the smaller theatre represents a room of a castle with a large door in the background opening out into the countryside. L'Amour, traditionally dressed - "tunique, aile, carquois doré, flèches, arc, bandeau sur les yeux"³⁸ - presents the situation, the plot and the outcome of the play:

Voilà la pièce que je vante. . .
La duchesse Filippino
Aime le berger Bellino
Qui pour l'approcher se déguise
En fille, ce qui favorise
Leur amour. Mais l'époux jaloux
Finit par les donner aux loups
Qui les mange dans la coulisse. . .³⁹

Thus within this smaller play one sees the metamorphosis of Bellino for which Casanova had been waiting. Predictably the "comédiens" proceed no further than the metamorphosis, for Casanova, seeing Bellino dressed as a charming girl proceeds towards the stage crying:

Ce n'était pas une folie!
C'était une fille jolie!
Venus et les Grâces n'ont pas
Autant d'appas!⁴⁰

All the actors (ie. on both stages) take up their cry of the first act: "il est fou, des plus fous!"⁴¹ and there is such confusion that

the curtain falls on the small theatre. Bellino reappears from behind the curtain, dressed once again as man, and with the traditional face slap, challenges Casanova to a duel to protect his honour and that of La Marquise. Casanova, who cannot believe so rapid a change in Bellino, accepts the challenge.

Act Three takes place in a park where Casanova and Bellino are to duel. Casanova, feeling himself shamed, is waiting impatiently for the arrival of his opponent. Instead, Rosinella, disguised as a man, appears and raises her sword to Casanova. Rosinella falls wounded and Casanova hides behind some bushes as he hears the approaching voices of the gypsies looking for Rosinella. When Casanova learns what has happened he resolves to avenge the death of Rosinella.

La Marquise appears next with the same intentions as had Rosinella. The same events occur and Casanova is left still more determined to kill Bellino. Bellino, however, has fallen in love with the hero and upon arriving on stage reveals herself in a "jupe courte."⁴² Casanova becomes immediately enamoured with her and the two engage in singing simultaneously different verses of a song. The lines are rhymed with each other and once again the effect of simultaneity is concentrated on musicality and rhythm rather than on the words themselves. After they leave, Bellino tells Casanova that he has in fact fulfilled his promise to kill Bellino and she adopts the name Bellina.

The last part of the act is very much in the style of traditional operas and seventeenth and eighteenth century comedies: all

the characters on stage for the revelation of the outcome or, as in the case of Casanova, for a last song exposing the final fate of everyone.

The characters of Casanova are all commedia dell'arte masques except for the four major personages: Casanova, Bellino, Rosinella and La Marquise.

The portrait painted of Casanova is indeed a conventional one. He believes himself to be a better lover than even Don Juan since he never leaves a woman unhappy:

. . . moi je ne fais pas de victimes
Je suis le plaisir et non l'ennui
Je commets des péchés, non des crimes.⁴³

He considers himself a free spirit, living only for the moment, guided by some indescribable force or god. In the preface to his Mémoires the essential liberty of man was one of the main points that the original Casanova brought out: "l'homme est libre; mais il cesse de l'être s'il ne croit pas à sa liberté. . . ." ⁴⁴ He goes on to state his essential belief in God and the gift of reason that God gives each man. The fact that this gift comes from the Supreme Power means that it is divine: "la raison est une parcelle de la divinité du Créateur."⁴⁵ It is because of this divine power and man's essential liberty that Casanova feels justified in all his exploits. Any action which goes against what Casanova feels would be the will of God is a sin. Thus when he discovers the true identity of Bellino, it is with horror that Casanova cries "et c'est contre l'Amour qu'hélas! j'allais me battre!" ⁴⁶ The hero is very willing to do battle to save either his own honour or, above all, a woman's.

"Ces beaux sbires", he complains of the police who are searching for him:

Ne comprennent rien à l'honneur
 Qui se fane comme une fleur
 Et qu'il faut qu'on arrose
 Avec du sang. . .⁴⁷

Bellino fills her function in the plot adequately. The fact that she is very beautiful (if Apollinaire's stage directions are followed: "il faut qu'elle soit très jolie"⁴⁸) does not seem to affect her posing convincingly as a man. This was a conventional trick of seventeenth and eighteenth century dramatists.⁴⁹ It all forms part of the enormous game which in fact the commedia dell'arte was, the various accepted conventions of the theatre or the "moule" to which Gustave Attinger refers.⁵⁰ The entire situation of Bellino is indeed reminiscent of the various "stratagèmes" which Molière's or Marivaux' characters devised to solve their problems. A mere change of sex was a simple matter especially when love or honour was involved. In a production, presumably Bellino would be very beautiful and the audience would, of course, realize from the beginning that she is disguised. This would have an added enjoyment which is impossible to obtain from a mere reading the text.

La Marquise is a comic figure providing a ridiculous representative of all the women who are after Bellino. One cannot help but laugh with Casanova when she is wounded in the duel:

Ma foi
 C'est bien moi! . . .
 Je suis morte peut-être!
 Vite un prêtre!⁵¹

But La Marquise is not uniquely a character for comic relief. At the beginning of the play she provides the reason for Casanova's first meeting with Bellino. It is La Marquise who convinces Casanova to help her win over Bellino, a task which the hero is willing to undertake for a former mistress.

Rosinella is not introduced until the middle of Act Two when she notices Casanova on the carnival grounds. He is at the time ripe for a beautiful girl for he has just convinced himself that Bellino is really a boy:

Fatale destinée!

 Ce n'est pas une fable!
 Bellino le garçon
 N'est pas fille! . . . 52

Rosinella provides a diversion for Casanova which helps to maintain his romantic image. In this sense she is a stretching device in the plot functioning as a pretext for Casanova when he is not concerned with Bellino and while the festivities of the carnival take place.

All the rest of the characters are ornamental having no function in the plot other than to provide an atmosphere or a background. They provide the plasticity of the spectacle which was so important to the commedia dell'arte: "quand nous la disons plastique, nous affirmons que la commedia dell'arte subordonne tout au spectacle."⁵³ The presence of the commedia dell'arte masques, especially, prevents (as it did originally in the sixteenth century) a spectator from reading too deep a meaning into the play or misinterpreting the author's intention altogether. The masques are associated firstly with a certain type of play (that is, a light

comedy), and secondly with a certain type of character; both of these types are fixed and as such serve only as symbols of unchangeable theatrical elements. As Attinger expresses it, a type is:

. . . cet être placé à mi-chemin entre la réalité et la symbole, et qui est lui aussi une expression plastique de la vie. Cette dualité qui est en lui le garde, d'un côté, des dangers d'une actualité quotidienne, un jour triomphante, oubliée le lendemain; et de l'autre, des excès de pensée d'un cerveau trop prompt à confier à la scène des réflexions qui n'y ont que faire, sous la forme littéraire ou philosophique qu'il lui a plu de leur donner.⁵⁴

The choruses in Casanova, unlike those of Couleur du Temps, do not function as did the Greek choruses. There are several different ones in Casanova, composed of the "comédiens" the "Dames de la ville", the "Zingarelles", "les sbirres" and the citizens. But rather than representing the collective conscience of the audience as in Couleur du Temps and the Greek theatre, they serve to furnish either background information or, as in most instances, to establish rhythms, cadences and leitmotifs which hold the play together. In all cases except the very first stanza by the "choeur des comédiens"⁵⁵ the verses are either repeated in their entirety or single lines are repeated. The purpose of this is once again to add to the overall plasticity of the production: ". . . puisqu'il s'agit presque exclusivement de théâtre comique, ajoutons que cette plastique se traduit en cadences et en rythmes extrêmement vifs, tant pour le geste que pour la parole."⁵⁶

The plastic and spectacular style of Casanova was not inherited solely from the commedia dell'arte. There are other elements

in the play which Apollinaire seems to have borrowed from other sources, as he often did. The characters and the mise-en-scène of the first act do recall the early Italian genre, as well as the spontaneity with which the actors speak and act. The success of the commedia dell'arte rested on the skills of the actors as musicians, wits and acrobats; according to Robert Mallet, Casanova ". . . témoignait de son [ie. Apollinaire] goût pour une forme dramatique où, plus que dans tout autre, les acteurs jouent."⁵⁷

The dialogue and style of verses Apollinaire borrowed from the Théâtres de la Foire in which the authors employed pat, strictly rhymed vaudeville couplets in parody of the higher forms of opera. In addition the melodramatic tendencies of Casanova were reminiscent of these carnival productions, a spirit which later developed into the Romantic theatre. The duels and the defence of one's honour in Casanova both recall a certain vaudeville atmosphere predominant in the fair theatres, the Romantic theatre and the boulevard theatres.

Nor was the style of Casanova totally new to the twentieth century. The boulevard theatres were still flourishing and the effects of Jacques Copeau were still felt long after Apollinaire was dead. Essentially Copeau's theories concerned a renovation of the art of the Italian theatre; he emphasized above all the skill of the actor integrated in a scenically rhythmic whole, a "poésie scénique."⁵⁸ The poetry of the theatre would consist of an amalgamation of all dramatic elements equally emphasized: ". . . ce concours accordé des mots, des gestes, des pas, du fard, du costume, de la lumière, de l'ombre, chaque élément jouant son rôle, et seulement le sien, le tout

rhythmiquement amalgamé constituant un poème."⁵⁹ The role of the word in Copeau's theatre was subordinated to that of gesture which he felt was the key to dramatic poetry. As Raymond says:

Le mot, tout en précisant la pensée, libérera
le geste, suscitant un éclairage ou motivant
une attitude. Il appellera une réponse, déclenchant à son tour le mécanisme gymnique ou scénique, selon un tempo, un rythme, qui est essentiellement le jeu dramatique.⁶⁰

In his Souvenirs du Vieux-Colombier, Copeau wrote of a production by his Copeaus of L'Illusion. From his description one can almost imagine a performance of Casanova:

On y voyait les comédiens s'arrêter en chantant sur une place de village, dresser en se jouant leur tréteau. Et la comédie se déroulait, mystère plutôt, avec des masques, un peu de musique, des esprits, un vieux paysan, une sorcière, une princesse, des assassins et des démons.⁶¹

This was the kind of rhythm that Apollinaire was trying to establish in Casanova - thus the outward banality of the plot and repetition of lines.

A poetry of the theatre was also the aim of Jean Cocteau. In Parade, Cocteau had reproduced a circus-like atmosphere, complete with the clowns, acrobats and music essential to the commedia dell'arte spirit. The importance of Apollinaire's association with Cocteau has already been discussed in Chapter Five.

It is regrettable that Casanova has never been produced, for the merits of this play, in contrast to Couleur du Temps, cannot be judged solely on the written work. David Grossvogel has criticized Casanova for what he terms its "bookish and static"⁶² faults and further accuses that "... the promise of the stage has not been

fulfilled."⁶³ But without the backing by an actual production of what was originally intended to be an operetta (which, by definition, is not a work to be read) the play cannot be criticized on the grounds chosen by this particular critic. If "the promise of the stage has not been fulfilled" the fault does not lie with either the play or the playwright. Grossvogel has once again underestimated the capabilities of Apollinaire.

The faults that do exist in the written play are much more obvious to a reader than they would be in a production. The simplicity of the plot and the soap opera tendencies would probably not appear as trite as they do in a reading. The music and spectacle of the performance as a whole would overshadow any awkwardness of the lines or commonplaceness of the plot. And in spite of the reservations of Robert Mallet, "Casanova [. . .] n'est dans l'oeuvre d'Apollinaire que l'amusement d'un jour de fantaisie,"⁶⁴ the play has a great deal more potential for the theatre perhaps not evident from reading it.

NOTES

¹Gustave Attinger, L'Esprit de la Commedia dell'Arte dans le Théâtre Français, (Paris, 1950), p. 433.

²Quoted by Adéma, Apollinaire le Mal-Aimé, p. 251.

³Apollinaire, Le Théâtre Italien, (Paris, 1910), p. 19.

⁴Ibid., p. 20.

⁵Ibid., pp. 19-20.

⁶Robert Mallet, preface to Casanova, (Paris, 1952), p. 9.

⁷Ibid., p. 10.

⁸Adéma, op. cit., pp. 250-251.

⁹"A la santé I", Alcools, O.C., Vol. 3, p. 135.

¹⁰Davies, op. cit., p. 186.

¹¹Adéma, op. cit., p. 250.

¹²See the Mémoires de Jacques Casanova, Vol. I, (Paris, n.d.), pp. 283-312.

¹³It is curious to note that Apollinaire's ambivalent character chose the name Bellina and not Thérèse especially considering the proximity of themes to Les Mamelles de Tirésias.

¹⁴O.C., Vol. 3, p. 71.

¹⁵O.C., Vol. 3, p. 704.

¹⁶Adéma, op. cit., p. 252.

¹⁷Mallet, op. cit., p. 9.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁹Alfred de Vigny, "Le Cor", Poésies Complètes, (Paris, 1962), p. 100.

²⁰O.C., Vol. 3, p. 747.

²¹Ibid., loc. cit.

²²Paul Verlaine, Oeuvres Poétiques Complètes, (Paris, 1954), p. 97.

²³O.C., Vol. 3, p. 750.

²⁴Verlaine, op. cit., loc. cit.

²⁵Attinger, op. cit., p. 434.

²⁶O.C., Vol. 3, p. 699.

²⁷Ibid., loc. cit.

²⁸Ibid., p. 717.

²⁹Ibid., loc. cit.

³⁰Ibid., p. 719.

³¹Ibid., loc. cit.

³²Ibid., p. 720.

³³Ibid., p. 722.

³⁴Ibid., p. 723.

³⁵Ibid., p. 725.

³⁶Ibid., p. 726.

³⁷Ibid., p. 728.

³⁸Ibid., loc. cit.

³⁹Ibid., pp. 728-729.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 733.

⁴¹Ibid., loc. cit.

⁴²Ibid., p. 746.

⁴³Ibid., p. 705.

⁴⁴Jacques Casanova de Seingalt, Mémoires de Jacques Casanova, Vol. I, (Paris, n.d.), p. 2.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 2.

⁴⁶O.C., Vol. 3, p. 746.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 744.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 746.

⁴⁹One notable example of this is Goldoni's Il Servitore di Due Padroni in which the heroine poses as a gentleman for most of the play.

⁵⁰Attinger, op. cit., p. 433.

⁵¹O.C., Vol. 3, p. 743.

⁵²Ibid., p. 723.

⁵³Attinger, op. cit., p. 433.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 434.

⁵⁵O.C., Vol. 3, p. 699.

⁵⁶Attinger, op. cit., p. 436.

⁵⁷Mallet, op. cit., p. 8.

⁵⁸Marcel Raymond, Le Jeu Retrouvé, (Montréal, 1943), p. 33.

⁵⁹Ibid., loc. cit.

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 33-34.

⁶¹Souvenirs du Vieux-Colombier, (Paris, 1931), pp. 118-119.

⁶²Grossvogel, op. cit., p. 35.

⁶³Ibid., loc. cit.

⁶⁴Mallet, op. cit., p. 11.

PART IV

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER IX

"Coming from no direction, he
knew not what direction to
go."¹

[LeRoy C. Breunig]

If the three plays of Guillaume Apollinaire are representative of three entirely different styles, it is probably the result of the author's own ambiguous nature and desire to develop a multidirectional style. From the time of his illegitimate birth in 1880 until his death thirty-eight years later, the poet successfully eluded classification by either himself or his friends. He refused to be compartmentalized and cultivated a veritable sense of freedom in his rootlessness.

Such complete liberty manifested in one man was an unusual phenomenon for the Paris in which Apollinaire lived, a Paris caught up in a tradition of "isms". Although Apollinaire was in effect a spokesman for many of these "isms" (in particular, Cubism, Futurism and Simultaneism), he was capable of evading their grasp. While one day he would praise the Cubist painters for various innovations, the next he would declare the prominence of the Futurists. He always seemed to be one step ahead of his contemporaries and it is for this reason that the artists with whom he associated looked upon him as the "ringleader of the arts."² Sanouillet describes this unusual aspect of Apollinaire this way:

. . . son autorité était telle que ceux qui débutaient dans les lettres ne pouvaient que se ranger sous sa bannière protectrice. [. . .] Nul ne savait exactement où diriger ses pas, et l'omniprésence du grand homme qui avait su si bien ménager les uns les autres dans ses Méditations esthétiques était à la fois rassurante et stimulante.

Toute la "jeune littérature" de l'époque souhaitait obtenir son patronage. . .³

This oscillation from one movement to another, from one style to another resulted mainly from two principal features of Apollinaire's personality: his "congenital indecisiveness"⁴ and his cult of "l'esprit nouveau". Coming from a less than secure background, the poet felt a constant need to belong to someone or something. He sought comfort in the personage of his mother, his several mistresses and his cluster of friends who always seemed to congregate around him. In 1914, in a desperate bid to acquire French citizenship, he joined the army. The poetry written during the period is reflective of a certain pride in his new-found patriotism:

Me voici libre et fier parmi mes compagnons
 Le Réveil a sonné et dans le petit jour je salue
 La fameuse Nancéenne que je n'ai pas connue⁵

Nevertheless, in spite of these attempts to find security in numbers, Apollinaire could rarely continue in one direction for any length of time. In a poem of Le Bestiaire he expresses this omnipresent incertitude:

Incertitude, ô mes délices
 Vous et moi nous nous en allons
 Comme s'en vont les écrevisses
 A reculons, à reculons.⁶

In apparent contradiction to these endeavours to find his own niche was the poet's cult of newness and surprise. Unable to find an "ism" that suited his various styles he invented "l'esprit nouveau" which he hoped would encompass all art that was new and different. In this sense he can be called avant-gardiste to a degree that none of his contemporaries ever reached. His efforts were relentless for he never ceased to develop new techniques and ideas.

A combination of these two features of newness and insecurity resulted in his three plays. Les Mamelles de Tirésias arose out of a sincere desire to amuse and entertain, for as he said, "c'est le but de toute oeuvre théâtrale."⁷ This somewhat superficial goal soon gave way to his ambition to renovate the theatre which he found to lack an optimistic outlook. Basically, he wanted something new in the dramatic arts and even before publishing "L'Esprit Nouveau et les Poètes", he coined the phrase in Les Mamelles de Tirésias: "on tente ici d'infuser un esprit nouveau au théâtre."⁸

However, the critical reaction to his play was unfavourable and Apollinaire, unaccustomed to being at the mercy of the critics, attempted to placate them in a bid to regain his place in the arts. This effort took the form of Couleur du Temps, a play which, while affiliated thematically with certain nineteenth century Symbolists, is nevertheless representative of Apollinaire's new spirit. The work was inspired by the war and, like the poems of Calligrammes, constituted a conscious effort to fantasize the combined horrors and beauties of the war. The various scenes such as the cabin of the airplane or the iceberg together with the woman in ice and the legs of the actors dangling from the ceiling, all served to further the playwright's ambition to infuse a new spirit into the theatre.

The ultimate pessimism of Couleur du Temps is, however, unusual for Apollinaire. Regarding art as the supreme form of human expression, he was extremely conscious of the impact that the art of a particular generation had on future societies. In all probability, the poet was aware of the defeatism manifest in his second play and

reluctant to appear pessimistic, he tried to camouflage his flagging personality by composing Casanova. This last play, besides being essentially a foil for the depression he felt during his final days, originated from an early interest in the Italian theatre. Rich in movement, music and spectacle, Casanova once again represents Apollinaire's need to entertain.

However, despite the vast differences in these three plays, there are a few linking themes. Probably the most pronounced of these is the theme of identity. For Apollinaire, an identity - of either animate or inanimate objects - is not a fixed thing and can be changed from one moment to the next depending upon the situation. For example, in Les Mamelles de Tirésias, the kiosk, with a moveable arm to replace the attendant, moves across the stage of its own accord; Thérèse's breasts are nothing but balloons; and of course the most obvious identity confusions concern the ambivalent characters of Thérèse-Tirésias, the husband-mother, and the policeman who was played by a woman. In Casanova a similar ambiguity is contained in the personage of Bellino-Bellina who succeeds in mystifying both the males and females in the play. These confusions of sexual identity are manifestations of an image frequent in Apollinaire's work - that of the androgyne.

In Couleur du Temps this theme takes on slightly different nuances. For the characters in this play, identity, or at least the concept of identity, is most important. Each of them starts the voyage with a fixed impression of the other characters. Their image of the others is established around their own self-image which each

feels to be supreme. By the time they realize that their impressions were wrong, it is too late. Even the identity of the woman in ice turns out to be false.

The preoccupation that Apollinaire had with the identities of people and things may have stemmed from his concern about his own illegitimate birth and feeling of rootlessness. As well, it shows the influence of Jarry's science of Pataphysics in which even the shapes of objects alter because of changes in perspective.

Linked to this theme of identity is that of Apollinaire's conception of woman. Throughout his works he both idealized woman and ridiculed her. The women with whom he fell in love were of widely diversified characters from the prim Annie Playden to the liberated and sensual Lou. Thérèse is, after a fashion, a combination of both extremes. She is at first a liberated woman renouncing all her feminine attributes but at the end she returns contentedly to the role of wife and mother. In Couleur du Temps also, two distinct types of woman are personified in Mavise and Madame Giraume, the former representing the liberated female and the latter the subservient woman. In Casanova this duality is once again manifested in the personage of Bellino.

Apollinaire's conception of love appears just as confused as his vision of women. Apparently to avoid commitment, he developed the theme of love as illusion. Love, he says, can be whatever one makes of it. Nevertheless, Apollinaire had great faith in the power of love and it was a great source of anguish for him to think that he might never love fully. Nyctor of Couleur du Temps expresses a

similar feeling:

Aimer c'est sans doute la formule
De la puissance absolue aimer
Mais qui peut aimer à volonté[?]9

The thematic similarities in the plays are not striking enough, however, to camouflage their differences. Because of this, it is difficult to trace any influence (or at least any single direction of influences) of Apollinaire's theatre in the twentieth century. It is Les Mamelles de Tirésias alone which has affected most profoundly the playwrights of the modern avant-garde. Showing a clear influence of the farcical techniques of Ubu Roi, the play makes use of a wide range of theatrical elements. Apollinaire's principal goal of Les Mamelles de Tirésias is contained in the following lines of the Prologue:

. . . notre art moderne
Mariant souvent sans lien apparent comme dans la vie
Les sons les gestes les couleurs les cris les bruits
La musique la danse l'acrobatie la poésie la peinture
Les chœurs les actions et les décors multiples¹⁰

This kind of theatrical collage was also used in Parade by Jean Cocteau who carried on a tradition of self-conscious theatricalism.

Probably the single most important element of Les Mamelles de Tirésias which was adopted almost universally by the Dadaists, Surrealists and Absurdists is the peculiar use of language. Apollinaire wanted to release words from their traditional connotations. Seeing the inherent ambiguity of all language, he tried to point out the richness of unusual word combinations. For Henri Béhar this freedom of language is "l'apport majeur du surréalisme":

. . . libération du langage, élément premier et privilégié du théâtre. C'est seulement en dégageant les mots de leur carcan étymologique, en les laissant jouer les uns avec les autres que l'on parvient à une production d'images sans précédent, susceptibles de traduire véritablement l'architecture monstrueuse du rêve. Les mots reviennent à l'état sauvage.¹¹

For Antonin Artaud, the return of words to their "état sauvage" was only a means for the return of man to his savage state. This was the principal aim of his Théâtre de la Cruauté in which he tried to "reawaken in [man] an awareness of the chaos that underlies life, the void that constantly threatens."¹² Artaud, together with the Surrealists tried to reproduce on stage the world of the dream. However, unlike the Surrealists who used the dream as a means for a psycho-analytical study of man, Artaud saw the dream as an expression of man's innermost savagery and primitivism:

Le théâtre ne pourra redevenir lui-même, c'est-à-dire constituer un moyen d'illusion vraie, qu'en fournissant au spectateur des précipités véridiques de rêves, où son goût du crime, ses obsessions érotiques, sa sauvagerie, ses chimères, son sens utopique de la vie et des choses, son cannibalisme même, se débordent, sur un plan non pas supposé et illusoire, mais intérieur.¹³

Among today's avant-gardistes Ionesco in particular has recognized the debt he owes to Apollinaire. In an interview on the BBC's Third Programme, January 5, 1960, he mentioned Les Mamelles de Tirésias as one of the early works that most impressed him "for it represents a style and a mentality of an entire epoch in its forthright rejection of fixed forms and ideas."¹⁴ In fact, much of Ionesco's theatre relies for its impact on his use of language which

he exploits much in the same way as did Apollinaire. Ruby Cohn draws attention to an Ionesco play, L'Avenir est dans les Oeufs, which she calls an "'ionescization'"¹⁵ of Les Mamelles de Tirésias. Both plays concern reproduction. In Ionesco's work, a young couple is persuaded by their relatives to have children. This occurs on stage in the form of an egg-laying scene. As in Les Mamelles de Tirésias, it is a man, Jacques, who reproduces in great quantity. Instead of cradles there is a proliferation of baskets of eggs.¹⁶

Compared to poetry and painting, the progress of the dramatic arts in the early years of the twentieth century was slow. From approximately 1900-1925 it appears that any avant-garde movement in anything except the theatre has received relatively rapid acceptance. This may perhaps explain why Apollinaire felt so self-conscious about Les Mamelles de Tirésias. When it was poorly received, he felt he had to regress to forms of drama already acceptable to the public and the critics. Had Apollinaire been living in 1971, he might not have felt so out of place with his contemporaries. Today the experimental theatre is not only accepted, it is expected and Apollinaire's "esprit nouveau" is almost a rule of art. Nevertheless, within his own period, he is best described as follows:

Un aventurier de la pensée, voilà ce qu'il fut d'abord, et la formule doit être prise dans son plein sens; des notions de liberté, de risque, d'aventure, il a fait des choses réelles, excitantes, dangereuses.¹⁷

NOTES

¹L.C. Breunig, Guillaume Apollinaire, (New York and London, 1969), p. 7.

²Shattuck, op. cit.

³M. Sanouillet, Dada à Paris, (Paris, 1965), p. 82.

⁴Breunig, op. cit., loc. cit.

⁵"2e Canonnier conducteur," Calligrammes, O.C., Vol. 3, p. 202.

⁶"L'Ecrevisse," O.C., Vol. 3, p. 38.

⁷Preface to Les Mamelles de Tirésias, O.C., Vol. 3, p. 609.

⁸O.C., Vol. 3, p. 619.

⁹O.C., Vol. 3, p. 677.

¹⁰O.C., Vol. 3, p. 619.

¹¹Béhar, op. cit., p. 24.

¹²Leonard Pronko, Avant Garde: The Experimental Theater in France, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1963), p. 14.

¹³Artaud, Le Théâtre et son Double in Oeuvres Complètes
d'Antonin Artaud, Vol. 4, (Paris, 1964), p. 109.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁵"Surrealism and Today's French Theatre," Yale French Studies,
no. 31 (1964), p. 164.

¹⁶A fuller study might be done tracing the other influences of
Apollinaire on Ionesco.

¹⁷Marcel Raymond, De Baudelaire au Surréalisme, (Paris, 1940),
p. 229.

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